

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823

F745o

v. 2

OTTERSTONE HALL.

OTTERSTONE HALL.

BY

URQUHART A. FORBES.

VOLUME II.

London:
ALEXANDER GARDNER,
12 PATERNOSTER ROW.

823

F 7453

v. 2

CONTENTS.

Chap.	Page
I.—In which Reginald restores an heirloom to its rightful owner,	9
II.—In which birds of a feather flock together, . . .	22
III.—At Otterstone Hall,	38
IV.—Is chiefly conversational,	50
V.—Retribution,	63
VI.—In which Lady Felsparley asserts her authority, .	86
VII.—Shows how Mr. Throckmorton had an adventure, and how Sybil went to the Wars,	101
VIII.—“What will Uncle Giles say?”	117
IX.—With the Army before Sebastopol,	137
X.—How Reginald Oakburne got his Majority, . . .	151
XI.—In which Mr. Portal becomes generous, . . .	163
XII.—Shows how Mr. Simcox found an old volume, and how Mr. and Mrs. Chessington went into exile, .	181
XIII.—A Meeting that was not all a merry one, . . .	203
XIV.—Is penultimate, and treats of the law's delays and other matters,	222
XV.—Beechcroft v. Chessington,	233



OTTERSTONE HALL.

CHAPTER I.

*In which Reginald restores an heirloom to its
rightful owner.*


A scene of death ! where fires beneath the sun,
And blended arms, and white pavilions glow ;
And for the business of destruction done,
Its requiem the war horn seem'd to blow.

CAMPBELL.

And thou wert once a maiden fair,
A blushing virgin warm and young ;
With myrtles wreathed in golden hair,
And glossy brow that knew no care—
Upon a bridegroom's arm you hung.

The golden locks are silvered now,
The blushing cheek is pale and wan,
The spring may bloom, the autumn glow,
All's one—in chimney corner thou
Sitt'st shivering on.

—THACKERAY (From the German of La Motte Fouqué.)

HOUGH Rustchuk with its domes, and minarets, and gardens, looks very picturesque as one approaches the bold promontory, overlooking the Danube on which it stands, it has all the unpleasant characteristics which are

wont to deter travellers from staying for any length of time in Turkish towns. Such at least was the conclusion come to by Messrs Oakburne and Danvers, as they sauntered through its silent thoroughfares one evening in July 1854. After landing at Venice they had made their way leisurely to Vienna, whence they had taken boat down the Danube, and had reached Rustchuk on the 22nd June, the day before the siege of Silistria had been raised. Lieut. Ballard, of the Indian army, who took such a prominent part in that memorable defence, had, shortly after their arrival, joined the force of Hassan Pasha, in which some half-dozen English officers were then serving. The offer of Oakburne and his companion to serve as volunteers had at once been accepted, and they in common with their brother officers, and indeed the whole Ottoman force, were just now fretting a good deal at their enforced inactivity, after hearing of the retreat of the huge Russian army which had besieged Silistria. On the further side of the Danube the garrison of Rustchuk could see the long lines of white tents of General Soimonoff's army, and watched its movements with unceasing vigilance and the greatest impatience.

As Oakburne and his friend made their way to their quarters, horsemen began to gallop hurriedly to and fro, and signs of activity began to be visible among the Turkish troops, and when they reached the quarters of the Turkish General and his staff, they learnt that Hassan Pasha was meditating making an attack next morning on an island which lies between Rustchuk and Giurgevo. Though some of the English officers, and notably Lieut. Burke, thought that the plan of this reconnaissance in force was unwise, all, both English and Turk, were

delighted at the idea of a brush with the enemy, and proceeded to make their preparations with great alacrity.

It was a lovely summer morning, deliciously fresh and bright, when the troops embarked in four boats, each carrying 350 men, and pushed off towards the island, some 900 yards distant from the Bulgarian, but only separated by a narrow channel from the Wallachian side of the Danube. Save for the necessary words of command, and the splash of the oars all was perfectly silent. A great eagle was sailing along in solitary grandeur above the noble expanse of water towards the mountains on the far horizon, and Oakburne, who was in the boat commanded by Lieut. Burke, could not help feeling impressed by the beauty and peace of the scene. Of the other boats, one was commanded by Captain Arnold, a second by Lieut. Meynell, and the third by General Cannon, who took command of the whole of this portion of the force. Each division made for a separate point of the shore, while another party of 200 men under Colonel Ogilvy, were carried across by a steamer and landed still higher up.

The four boats made the land very nearly at the same time, and the Russian pickets though they at first retired rather hastily, were speedily reinforced, and opened a hot fire on the men as they disembarked, to which the latter replied as well as they could. Burke, who led on his little force most gallantly, was attacked, the moment he leapt on shore by some six soldiers, two of whom he shot with his revolver, while a third he cut down with his sword, when the others turned and fled. As he was endeavouring, however, to form his men, he was again attacked by overwhelming numbers, and after a heroic defence fell pierced with two rifle balls

and thirty bayonet wounds. Then ensued a terrible hand to hand fight. Oakburne and his fellow subalterns, rallying their division, managed to fight their way to the point where Arnold, who had at first driven the Russians from one of their entrenchments but had been in his turn forced to retire, was endeavouring to maintain himself. But the attacking force was so seriously outnumbered, that its gallant efforts were for the time unavailing. Scarcely had Oakburne reached Arnold's side when fresh Russian reinforcements renewed the attack with irresistible fury. He saw his leader fall with a bayonet wound through his heart, and cut down his assailant. Then he found himself almost surrounded, and fighting desperately with the enemy, who were aiming blows at him from all sides. He had rid himself of two of his assailants when his sword broke on the helmet of a third, and then a tremendous blow on the head stretched him senseless on the ground. When he came to himself he was a prisoner with his hands bound, and a Russian soldier was standing guard over him, while a fair haired, blue eyed young officer was seated on a chair watching him with evident interest.

‘Ha! you are yourself again,’ said he in French. ‘I thought there was not much the matter with you. Look at him, doctor.’

At this a third personage, standing behind Reginald,—who was chiefly conscious that his head and right leg and arm were very sore,—bent over the pallet on which he was lying and felt his pulse, after which he said something in Russian to the officer, who seemed much pleased with his report, and left the room.

Gradually Oakburne began to realise his surroundings, and was soon able to reply to the questions of the young

officer, who informed him he was Count Dorikoff, and had had command of one of the Russian earthworks, after which he proceeded to tell him how it was he had fallen into his hands.

It appeared that the attack at this point had been unsuccessful, and that General Cannon had been obliged to recross to Rustchuk, in order to obtain reinforcements. The Russian soldiery taking advantage of this lull in the attack, had begun plundering the dead and wounded, and one of them was attracted by an object glittering on Oakburne's chest, from which his tunic had been torn in the mêlée. This was no other than the locket given to him by Dr. Rovelli, which he had taken to wearing under his uniform and had neglected to remove before going into action, and in which the young fellow was sentimental enough to carry a lock of Sybil Beechcroft's brown hair, alongside of that fair curl which had been placed there by its original owner. Oakburne, who had fallen on his back with his right arm across his breast, was still grasping the revolver he had drawn when his sword broke. It was at full cock, and as the Russian, eager to seize the locket with its circle of brilliants, tried to disengage it from his neck, the sleeve of his grey great coat caught in the lock causing it to go off and wound him in the leg. Like most of his countrymen of the lower ranks he was very superstitious, and, imagining that the locket was a charm which had caused his injury, he gave vent to a howl of mingled rage and terror, which excited the curiosity of his captain, Count Dorikoff, who happened to come up at that moment. On discovering Oakburne to be an English officer and not dead, he had had him carried into the entrenchment and had placed him under the doctor's care. The rem-

nant of the Turkish force under Col. Ogilvy had meantime managed to keep their position on the extreme edge of the island until reinforcements commanded by Ali Pasha arrived from Rustchuk, after which they managed to entrench themselves and maintain a desperate conflict until sunset, when by mutual consent the firing ceased, and both parties withdrew to the shelter of their works. Under the cover of night the Russians retreated, some to Frateschi some to Kalugerni, and the third division which comprised Count Dorikoff's regiment, to a position more in the neighbourhood of Bucharest, in a house in which town the latter had lodged himself and his English prisoner. On examination, it was found that, beyond contusions on his head and arm Oakburne, had received no real injury, and in a few days he had quite recovered.

All these facts were imparted to Oakburne by his captor on their march to Galatz, for fortunately for him as it turned out, Count Dorikoff had himself been slightly wounded, and was sent in charge of a detachment of sick and wounded to Odessa. The count was a young man of good family and a distant connexion of the great Prince Woronzoff. During their long march through the dreary region of the Drobrudscha, and the almost equally desolate country of the Steppes, the two young men became very great friends. The Count could not only speak French but also knew a little English. He expressed the greatest interest in hearing all about Oakburne's native country. His grandfather had, he said, been entirely educated in England, as was also indeed his connection, Prince Woronzoff, and had there formed one or two very close friendships. One of them was with a Mr. Beechcroft, a man of property. Did Reginald know the name? Yes? That was very odd. This Mr. Beechcroft had married a

lady, a Miss Chessington, who should have been an heiress, but who somehow never got her property, which was a sad thing, as her husband had played a good deal and lost heavily to the Count's grandfather. The latter had been a very fortunate gambler, and had almost ruined another friend of his, a certain Chevalier Léon, a Frenchman. He and the Chevalier and Beechcroft had travelled over Europe together; and his grandfather's good luck at play had never in anyway interfered with the intimacy of the trio. All this, it may be imagined, was very interesting to Reginald, who thus learnt for the first time something of the Beechcrofts' claim to Otterstone Hall, and who in turn told his new friend all he knew about the family.

On their arrival at Odessa, Oakburne, thanks to Count Dorikoff's influence, was most comfortably housed, and continued to receive the greatest kindness from his captor, who was, to tell the truth, rather proud of his prisoner. The officers and crew of the *Tiger*,—which it will be remembered ran aground near a lighthouse some four or five miles from the city,—had been brought into Odessa some two months before. As English manners, owing to Prince Woronzoff's early training and inclinations, were at that time in vogue there, these English prisoners, the first taken during the war, received, as is well known, an amount of consideration from all with whom they had to do during their captivity, which was as creditable to their kind gaolers as it must have been astonishing to themselves. Hence Count Dorikoff, having one of these lions, so to speak, all to himself, made a good deal of Reginald, who thus was enabled to see something of Russian society, as well as everything worth seeing in the place and in its neighbourhood.

This pleasant captivity, however, did not last long. The English admiral having proposed an exchange of prisoners, the Czar abandoned his first decision that the officer commanding the *Tiger* should proceed to St. Petersburg, and that the other officers and men should be sent to Riazin, a town some 100 miles south-east of Moscow, and so it came about that at the end of July Oakburne found himself, in company with others of his fellow captives, on board an English man-of-war bound for Varna. Count Dorikoff who accompanied him to the ship gaily announced his intention as soon as hostilities should be over,—which could not but be soon,—of visiting England, when he should delight to renew his acquaintance with ‘*son cher captif*,’ as he used to call him. The pair parted with mutual regret and feelings of deep gratitude on Oakburne’s part for all his captor’s kindness. Often in after years did Reginald recall the bright handsome face, and laughing blue eyes of this kind-hearted young fellow as he stood waving him a cheery farewell while the vessel steamed out of the magnificent harbour of Odessa, with its crowded shipping and the stately buildings of the city rising behind it.

From some of the officers on board Oakburne heard that his friend Danvers, who had escaped unhurt from the battle of Giurgevo, had been summoned to England by urgent private affairs, and having also learnt that his regiment was one of those which had been sent from India to take part in the forthcoming campaign, he determined to abandon his idea of going home, and to rejoin it at once.

He had long since resolved that he would return the locket, to which, it might really be said, he owed his life,

to Dr. Rovelli's relatives, and as soon as he had settled himself at Varna, he sent it to his brother Wilfrid, giving him a full account of how it had come into his possession, and had been the means of preserving him from death, as well as of the particulars he had learnt from Count Dorikoff as to the Beechcroft family. He concluded by begging him to take the locket to the address which Dr. Rovelli had given him, and to let him know the result as speedily as possible.

The month of August was drawing to a close, and the hospitals were becoming crowded, and necessities scarcer, and things in general were beginning to look very gloomy at Varna, when he received a reply from his brother, the contents of which he read with very great interest. The latter had, he said, satisfactorily executed his commission, and, in so doing had discovered another link in a chain of evidence relating to a matter which had long interested him. He then proceeded to tell him of his acquaintance with Hoffbauer, and all those details relating to the latter's connection with Estelle Chessington, with which the reader has already been furnished. He further stated that his task was made much easier by the fact that a certain Madam Ledru, a friend of Hoffbauer's, to whom the latter had introduced Wilfrid, was already acquainted with Madam Rovelli, whom she constantly visited.

'When I called,' said the writer, 'I of course asked to see Madam Rovelli, and was rather surprised on being ushered into the drawing-room to find myself in the presence of a white haired, decrepit looking lady, whose age I have since learnt is not less than eighty-six or eighty-seven. As, however, you did not mention the doctor's age, and as the servant indicated this venerable lady as

the mistress of the house, I at once told her the object of my visit, and concluded by showing her the locket. Until I gave it to her her manner had been remarkably quiet. She seemed indeed scarcely to comprehend what I said, though she now and then murmured two or three words in English, which she spoke with a strong foreign accent, and in fact she almost gave me the impression that she was not in full possession of her senses. But directly she saw the locket she uttered a cry so strange that it quite startled me. It sounded like the utterance of one coming to life again after a long insensibility.

“*Mon Dieu! Monsieur!*” cried she, “tell me for the love of Heaven how you became possessed of this!” Her eyes sparkled, she sat upright in her chair, and seemed suddenly to have grown twenty years younger.

‘As I had just been telling her the whole story as clearly as I could, this rather embarrassed me, but I proceeded again to repeat what I had heard from you. She seemed however to pay no more attention to my second account than to my first; but kept gazing at the locket till at last she burst forth into ejaculations of “*Estelle! Estelle! Ma pauvre petite seur. On t’a trahis! On t’a trahis! Ah! ma chère Estelle!*” and then she began crying bitterly, mingling her sobs with incoherent exclamations and self reproaches.

“I am sorry to have distressed you, madam,” I began, when to my relief Madam Ledru and another lady entered the room. The former at once introduced me to her companion, who proved to be the younger Madam Rovelli, an Englishwoman, the widow of the old lady’s son and the mother of your unfortunate friend, the doctor. Then for the third time I repeated the history of your meeting with her son, to whom she appears to have been deeply

attached. She seemed to be very much moved by my account, and charged me with a very grateful message of thanks to you, though she also took your address for the purpose of writing to you herself. No doubt from what I have already told you you will have justly concluded that this elder Madam Rovelli is the sister of Estelle Chessington, Hoffbauer's grandmother, who met such a sad death during the French Revolution. It appears that some years after their flight from Paris—you will remember that they then went to Milan—the poor lady was seized with a mysterious attack which threw her into a cataleptic state for some ten years. During that period her husband died, and her son brought her with his wife and only child (your Dr. Rovelli) to England, where they finally settled. Here after a time the old lady began to recover her powers by degrees, but seems never quite to have done so till the sight of this locket, which she cannot have seen for some thirty years at least, suddenly revived all her early recollections. She listened intently while I talked to her daughter-in-law, and at the first pause in the conversation between us began, to our surprise, telling us in the most vivid manner the whole story of her unfortunate sister's life. It appears that this locket, which had been given to Estelle Chessington by the man whom she persisted in styling her husband, was handed over by her to her sister on her deathbed, to be kept for her daughter. On Madam Rovelli's illness her son, who took possession of all his mother's trinkets, gave it to his own wife, who, as you know, in turn gave it to *her* son, Dr. Rovelli. During one of our interviews with old Madam Rovelli, she produced the receipt of Richard Hoffbauer for monies sent by her for the maintenance of little Mina Chessington her niece, also two letters, writ-

ten to Estelle Chessington by her supposed husband, from the "house of Mr. Woodbrige, No. 21 Bedford Street, Covent Garden," in which he addresses her as "my dear wife." There appears to be no doubt that the sorrow she had undergone with regard to her sister, coupled with the fact that her husband would never yield to her constant entreaties to receive her niece Mina into his home, acted so strongly on Madam Rovelli as to produce the illness which so long robbed her of her faculties. I have now told you all I can of this extraordinary history, and you will see that my friend, Throckmorton, who, as you know, takes great interest in the matter, has good grounds for concluding ; — 1st, that Mina Chessington was the illegitimate daughter of Estelle Leon and a Lieut. Chessington, though who the latter was it is almost impossible to say, since there were three of the name in the army at that time ; and 2nd, that her son, Theodore Hoffbauer, is the great nephew of old Madam Rovelli.

'Talking of Chessington brings me to another piece of information which will rather surprise you, namely, that in October I am going to Otterstone Hall on a visit to Walter Chessington, the member for Lidfield, our meeting with whom you will of course remember. I need not tell you how glad I am to have this opportunity of visiting the old place, of which I shall write you a full account. Mind that in return you send plenty of news of yourself to,

Your ever affectionate brother,

WILFRID OAKBURNE.

'P.S.—I had almost forgotten to ask you to keep a look out for a great friend of mine, Jim Norton, who is just going out as army surgeon to join the force at Varna.

He is a St. Christopher's man, and has lived in these lodgings with me ever since I came to London, and moreover paid us a visit at Lidfield last winter. You will be glad to hear that I am an M.D. at last.'

While Reginald was pondering over the contents of this letter he was suddenly aroused by a tremendous shouting and cheering outside, and two of his brother officers rushing in great excitement into his tent, told him that the long wished for news had arrived, and that the advance of the allies to the Crimea had been definitely announced.


From that moment everything was forgotten in the intense excitement and military enthusiasm that pervaded the whole force, which set sail from the Bay of Varna on the 7th September.

CHAPTER II.

In which birds of a feather flock together.

He is, by continual application, become a general master of secret history, and can give an account of the intrigues, private marriages, competitions, and stratagems, of half-a-century.—DR. JOHNSON (*The Rambler*).

It is not but by experience, that we are taught the possibility of retaining some virtues, and rejecting others, or of being good or bad to a particular degree.—DR. JOHNSON (*The Rambler*).

N the day after the result of the Lidfield election had been publicly declared, Mr. Raymond D'Arcy Portal had found it advisable to quit home for a time on a visit to the Continent. He had easily succeeded in making good his escape to his father's house when he had fled from the fury of the mob, aroused by Lois Simcox's denunciations of him ; and owing to her sudden illness, and the excitement consequent on the Liberal victory, the unpleasant episode was for the time forgotten by the Lidfield public. Still there was no knowing how soon it might not be remembered against him, and he had always borne such a high character in the place, that an attack on his reputation would have been very disagreeable. There was therefore nothing for it but to make a clean breast of it to his father, and though that gentleman, himself a high-principled man, was at first deeply pained, by the disclosure of his son's guilt, his great affection for

the offender, supported by the able pleading of Portal's devoted mother, eventually led him to forgive him. Young men would be young men ; there was no good in crying over spilt milk ; Raymond was deeply penitent, and no doubt the girl had led him on ;—and so he gave his son a handsome cheque on his bankers, and the next day Mrs Portal announced to her friends that ' dear Raymond had been suddenly taken ill after the election,—entirely through overwork, he was so entirely devoted to his duty !—and Dr. Dosey had said he *must positively* go to Switzerland for a couple of months.' The two months however expanded into three, and when the invalid returned to Lidfield it was only for a day, and his friends learnt that with his usual self-denial he had, since the business interests of the firm required it, accepted a post in the House of their London agents, Messrs Quipson, Leaseby, and Mallage, the head of which was the elder brother of the junior partner of the Lidfield solicitors.

Life in London was by no means disagreeable to Portal. He had of course heard of Lois's death during his absence, and that, and the fact that her father had gone to live at Rolhill with his sister and her husband, added to the oblivion that so speedily shrouds the events of last quarter, would have made his return to his home quite consistent with prudence. Still there was no harm in making perfectly sure of a thing, and therefore, as this opening offered, he willingly closed with it. He found it moreover an agreeable change after life at Lidfield, and it was eventually the means of bringing him into close contact with various personages who had a great share in the events of this history.

Besides their numerous aristocratic and well-to-do clients there were others of less repute,—commission

agents, persons connected with the dramatic profession, and speculators whose credit was rather shaky,—who sometimes had recourse to the firm of Quipson, Leaseby, and Mallgage for advice. It was in this way that Portal, who now found himself a good deal brought in contact with these, first made the acquaintance of Mr. Vernon 'Trapster of the Momus Theatre,—who was at times only kept going by the good offices of his solicitors,—and also of Mons. Reuben Ledru of the Café Frankfurt. The latter, who had been mixed up in a very shady money lending case, had been, thanks chiefly to Portal, completely exonerated from all liability regarding it, and from that time the pair became close friends.

The novelty of his work, which was in many respects unlike any he had had at Lidfield, made it for a time a pleasant variety to Portal, who, it is hardly necessary to say, did not forget to give himself plenty of amusement. He had a fair share of respectable acquaintances, among whom was Mr. Mallgage, the junior partner of the firm, to whose third daughter, Miss Joana Mallgage, he at this time began to pay his addresses. The match was felt to be desirable by both families for financial and other reasons, and it was doubtless because the prospect of hum-drum married life began to grow a little oppressive, that Mr. Portal now became somewhat dissipated. Now too for a time his usual luck deserted him. He managed to 'drop' a good deal of money at play, and was beguiled into laying heavily against Mr. Gully's 'Andover,' the Derby winner of that year, and the same gentleman's 'Hermit' with which it will be remembered, he won the Gold Vase at Ascot. Through Mr. Vernon Trapster he was introduced to the well known and charming Miss Popsie Delacourt,—an actress justly celebrated for her success

in 'breeches' parts at the 'Momus' and other theatres, who afterwards married Lord Wandlemeer,—and spent a good deal more money than he could at all afford on that fascinating young lady. In short, he began to find himself extremely 'hard up,' and it was while he was casting about how he should 'raise the wind' in order to free himself from them, that he became acquainted with Theodore Hoffbauer.

The latter when on his sick bed, touched with the unlooked for kindness of friends, and full of regretful remembrances of the past, had made many good resolutions as to the future, which shared,—like alas! those of so many of the best of us,—the fate of that vow to become a monk which an old rhyme declares a certain personage to have made when similarly circumstanced. When he learnt that old Madam Rovelli was his great-aunt, and on visiting her in Bedford Square, received from the old lady herself a substantial acknowledgement of the fact, all his old inclinations to reckless extravagance revived in him. He might have tried, however, to obtain some steady occupation, had it not been, in the first place, that he was waiting to see whether Chessington would fulfil his promise of helping him, which he still delayed to do, and, in the next, that his unfortunate connection with Madam Ledru led him into a reckless mode of life.

Finding time hang heavy on his hands he took to frequenting the casinos and gambling tables patronised by the polyglot community of political refugees, which then haunted the region round Leicester Square and Soho. With most of these Hoffbauer's career made him hale fellow well met, and enabled him to sympathise to some extent with their futile plots and intrigues, and the swaggering gallantry which not unfrequently led to

desperate duels between them. It was at one of these hells that he first fell in with Portal, who went everywhere and prided himself on seeing all kinds of life. The chance meeting led to a closer acquaintance, and one day the German, who was naturally frank and communicative, showed him the other documents relating to his birth, as to which he had already consulted Wilfrid Oakburne and his friend Mr. Throckmorton. Portal after studying them carefully came to the same conclusion that the two last named friends of Hoffbauer had done, viz:—that the latter was the grandson, through a mock marriage, of Estelle Léon and some individual calling himself Lieut. Chessington; and having determined this point, he further resolved that he would if possible make it useful to himself. That correspondence of George Chessington's which he knew to be in Lord Ashleigh's possession, and which he had taken the opportunity of reading during the Lidfield election, had shown him enough to make him think that these documents which Hoffbauer set such store by might possibly be used to extort money from Walter Chessington or his uncle. Money he must have in some way, and this mode of raising it would have the advantage of enabling him to have his revenge on Lord Ashleigh and Walter, whom he could never forgive for having, as he considered, deprived him of Beatrice Elkfield and her fortune. Hoffbauer, too, would make an admirable tool, behind whom, if necessary, he could screen himself, so he managed to pump the latter very skilfully as to all that he required to find out of his family history, and was preparing to sound him with respect to his willingness to enter into his scheme when Wilfrid Oakburne, unexpectedly, and quite unintentionally, interposed to frustrate it.

It happened that the latter had gone down to Sydenham with Hoffbauer to witness the opening by the Queen and Prince Albert of the Crystal Palace, which it is hardly necessary to remind the reader was a very grand ceremony, attended by the Primate, the Ministry, the Lord Mayor, and various other great personages. The pair, though now close friends, did not often make such expeditions together, but on this occasion the German, who had an almost childish pleasure in witnessing sights of this kind, had persuaded the young doctor to accompany him. The great business of opening the building had been duly performed, and having taken the refreshment necessary after the fatiguing process of watching it, they were sauntering through the grounds when they suddenly came on Portal, accompanied by Miss Popsie Delacourt. Hoffbauer greeted him with a friendly nod as the couple passed them, and Oakburne at once recognised the man who had ruined Lois, and done so much to make his own life miserable. They had accidentally met once before in London at an evening party, and had carefully avoided each other ever since, and on this second rencontre Portal also wisely ignored Wilfrid, as he had also to do young Mallage and his sister Joana, whom he and Miss Delacourt nearly ran into as they were hurrying to witness the departure of the royal party.

‘You know that man then, Hoffbauer?’ asked his friend.

‘Certainly I do, mein Vilfrid,’ says the other. ‘He is a young lawyer. Very clever too, let me tell you! But you know him also, it seems, yes? And you do not like him, no?’

‘He is a villain!’

‘A villain? how my boy? The man we like not shall always be so; yes? But this one is a very pleasant villain, let me tell you, who shall I think be most useful in my legal affairs. His beautiful companion, who ravishes one with her dancing at the theatre, she shall be wunder-hübsch, nicht war?’

‘For Heaven’s sake do not trust him!’ cried Wilfrid. ‘He is capable of any crime!’ and, on being pressed for his reasons, he gave his companion such an account of Portal as made him open his eyes and express strong disgust.

‘I don’t like speaking against the man more than I can help, much as he has injured me,’ said he, ‘but as you talk about his being useful to you I feel it my duty to tell you what I know, and warn you against trusting him.’

‘You have right mein freund Vilfrid, and I thank you! Yes, ver mosh I thank you my boy!’ and as they went back to London together he managed to extract a few more particulars from Wilfrid as to Portal’s career, which confirmed still more strongly his newly-formed prepossession against him.

Hence it came about that when, some short time after this visit to the Crystal Palace, Portal made known to Hoffbauer, at a dinner to which he had invited him for the purpose, his project of extorting money from Walter Chessington by means of the papers shewn him by the German, the latter rejected his proposals with scorn and anger. Had Portal suggested Lord Ashleigh instead of the young owner of Otterstone Hall, Hoffbauer’s wrath would not perhaps have been so strongly kindled, for he had mixed with so many questionable characters that he had been accustomed to hear not un-

frequently propositions of an equally mean and revolting character freely advanced. Towards Walter Chessington, however, his feelings of gratitude were very strong, and the fact that he had saved Walter's life, and Walter had saved his, made a bond between them which he was determined nothing should ever break, if he could help it. The thought that he should be considered capable of the baseness of trying to extort money from one who had saved him from starvation and was still sending him pecuniary aid, excited such an anger in him as made his host turn pale through the fear that it might vent itself in personal violence.

'Yes! yes! you are a rascal! a dam rascal, sir!' cried Hoffbauer, rising from the table. 'Donnerwetter! you dare to propose this to me! You will sit there quietly and ask me to rob my penefactor, the fren' of my sorrows! Gott in Himmel! This should demand a punishment, this insult you put on me! Yes! I know, young man, of your evil history! I hear of your earlier doings, sir, from one who knows you well, from my fren' Vilfrid! You give me the wish to chastise you had I not sat at your table! I will not eat your bread, who thus dishonour me, sir! Take then my moneys, the price of the food you have given me! From henceforth we are no more to be acquainted, Donnerwetter!' and flinging down a sovereign on the table he left the room.

It was lucky perhaps that they were in a private room, and that Portal was well known to the proprietor of the restaurant in Regent Street where they were dining. Being, however, in the habit of frequenting it, he was able to reassure the scared waiter who had rushed up stairs at the sound of Hoffbauer's loud voice, and whom the

latter in his descent nearly knocked over and cursed in good round German for his clumsiness in getting in the way. Portal told the fellow with a significant smile on his pale face that the foreign gentleman was rather queer and had had too much wine, and he paid his bill with a somewhat trembling hand, and went away full of suppressed hatred and anger not only against Hoffbauer but against Wilfrid Oakburne, whom he of course recognised as the 'fren' Vilfrid' from whom the former had got his information respecting his past life.

'This sanctimonious fool is always crossing my path!' said he savagely to himself. 'He succeeded once, but he shall be taught that it is dangerous to meddle with me, and so shall that pig-headed German too.' As he walked on with these angry feelings in his heart he found himself close to the door of the Café Frankfurt, at which Mons. Ledru, the proprietor, chanced to be standing, enjoying the cool air of the summer evening. The latter, always on very good terms with the young solicitor, on this occasion greeted him with more than usual civility, and asked him to step into his private room, as he wanted to consult him on a matter of business.

Mons. Ledru was a good deal altered from the stalwart personage to whom the reader was introduced at the beginning of these pages as Reuben Pfeiffer. Time had not only 'to silver turned' the coarse hair and beard which had been coal black in 1848, but had given a thickness and rotundity to his person, as well as a redness to his nose, and a wateriness and peculiarly unpleasant expression to his eyes. The love of generous Rhine wine which had distinguished Herr Reuben the money-lender, had in Mons. Ledru the restaurant proprietor developed into a

passion for ardent spirits but he was still as unscrupulous, cruel, shrewd, and keen in his pursuit of money as of old. As has been mentioned above the pair were on very good terms, Portal, who often visited him at St. John's Wood, where he now lived in much splendour, having borrowed some money from him which he at present found it difficult to repay, and having in return frequently given him professional advice when he required it.

On the present occasion Reuben seemed unwilling to begin the conversation, and so Portal, partly thinking he might learn something, and partly for something to say, asked him if he could give him any information about a certain refugee who had for a long time passed under the name of Karl, but who also called himself Hoffbauer. He felt sure that there must be some dark pages in Hoffbauer's past life which could be used against him, and he knew that Reuben Ledru was acquainted with something of the history of most of the political exiles with whom the German associated.

Reuben's face changed colour and he rapped out a savage oath at the mention of the name, while Madam his wife, who had been sitting scarcely noticed in a corner of the room, also started and gave vent to an exclamation of surprise, which at once attracted Reuben's attention. He told her fiercely to go up to his room and see if certain papers had been placed there, adding that she need not come back as he wanted to speak to Portal on business. Frederica, preserving her usual haughty calm of manner, and returning Portal's salutation with a cold little bow, at once left the room; and as she did so the latter, who admired, and was always polite to her,

noticed that she had an ugly scar on her left cheek, as to the cause of which he drew his own conclusions.

‘Yes. I know this Hoffbauer,’ said Reuben, after she had closed the door. ‘And I know nothing good of him, Mr. Portal. He is a wild fellow! turbulent, unscrupulous; a dangerous man! Have nothing to do with him, sir, or with any of those refugees. As a rule they are all bad!’ and he proceeded to tell his guest, much to the latter’s satisfaction, all that he knew, and a great deal that he invented on the spur of the moment, against the character of the unfortunate Hoffbauer, till Portal, having heard enough, changed the subject by asking what Ledru wished to consult him about.

The matter in question was, as he said, a sad trial to this excellent creature. He suspected Madam Ledru of being faithless to him! She whom he had overwhelmed with so much love and tenderness! and the viper who had ruined his domestic Eden was, strangely enough, no other than this very Hoffbauer,—a man whom he treated with every kindness, to whom in earlier days he been almost a father! He had borne long and patiently with Frederica, but he could bear with her no longer; and it was on this point that he wanted his good friend Portal’s counsel.

His ‘good friend Portal,’ though ignorant of Reuben’s former wickednesses with regard to poor Frederica, whose life he had ruined, was nevertheless well aware that he treated his wife brutally, shrewdly suspected him of beating her, and was acquainted with the lady who presided over the smart establishment in St. John’s Wood. He felt certain, therefore, that there was something more important behind this tirade against Madam Ledru, to which he listened with fitting expressions of

regret and sympathy, and his surmise was presently justified when Reuben explained to him that the great bar to dissolving his union with his wife was the fact that she would inherit a valuable legacy from Madam Rovelli, which he did not see how to get into his own power, if he decided to do so. Was it possible to obtain it in any other way? Could Portal help him?

It is not necessary to burden the reader with all that passed between this worthy pair. Suffice it to say that after one or two consultations Portal evolved a pretty little scheme by means of which Madam Ledru was to be driven, through threats of exposure, separation, &c., to sign a document, to be drawn up by him, bequeathing all the property she expected to acquire from Madam Rovelli, to her beloved husband 'Reuben Ledru,' who, in consideration of his professional services in this matrimonial difficulty, was content to forego Portal's debt to him. Reuben was quite confident that he could so work on his wife, by judicious bullying, as to make her sign anything he wanted, for, by means of various spies, he had long been informed not only of her meetings with Hoffbauer, but also, as he told Portal, of various interviews which she was known to have had with a certain young Dr. Oakburne, a friend of the German's. All this was, as may be supposed, delightful to Portal, who thus saw an opportunity of revenging himself on two of his enemies at once; and he formed such a high opinion of Reuben's cleverness, and usefulness as a coadjutor, that he not only entered heart and soul into his project, but also imparted to him all he knew of Hoffbauer's family history, and persuaded him to join him in his scheme of extorting money by means of it from Walter Chessington and his uncle Lord Ashleigh. Having therefore devised

these excellent plans, these two conspirators proceeded to set them in train with a skill and audacity which, if such qualities deserve success, certainly merited it in a high degree.

Summer had passed away, the Arctic Expedition had sailed in search of Sir John Franklin, the cholera had begun its ravages, news had been received from Lord Raglan regarding the successful landing of our army in the Crimea, and many other equally important events had happened while Messrs. Ledru and Portal had been maturing their scheme, when one fine warm night towards the end of September, the former changed the whole aspect of affairs by taking more Hollands than was good for him.

Owing either to the heat of the weather, the state of his liver, or perhaps to imprudent anticipations of triumph Mons. Ledru drank more deeply than usual that evening, and beginning with a little coarse sarcasm, passed on to virulent and foul-mouthed abuse of his wife. No one was more a master of this art than he was, and in the delights of its exercise he was carried away beyond the limits of common caution. His taunts were such as even Frederica, hardened as she had become to them, could not endure in silence. She answered with bitter and angry replies that excited Reuben to still more violent and offensive language, till the recriminations became so vehement that, maddened by anger and drink he struck her such a blow as made her reel for a moment into a chair with a shriek that startled several of those in the neighbouring houses. He gazed at her half frightened by what he had done, but when she rose, and with the blood trickling down her face, quitted the room, he felt

reassured, and sitting down again resumed his drinking till, heavy with liquor, he sank into a sottish sleep in his chair. When he came to himself next morning, and had to set about the business of the day, he learnt, to his wrathful amazement, that the wife he 'had overwhelmed with so much love and tenderness' had quitted his roof, as she informed him in the note she had left for him, never more to return to it.

Portal calling on him that evening, after a hard day's work, was astonished and rather uneasy at the state of passionate excitement in which he found Reuben, who was increasing it by constant recourse to the bottle. That his wife should dare to leave him had never entered this outraged husband's head, for he had grown to look on her as completely his slave ; but what was still more annoying was that he could not find the slightest clue to the fugitive's whereabouts. Madam Rovelli knew nothing of her and could therefore give him no assistance ; and the only information he had obtained at the lodgings in Poulford Street, was that Hoffbauer and Oakburne had gone together into the country, on a visit to Walter Chessington at Otterstone, which made it impossible that she could be with them. Nevertheless, he said, he felt convinced that Hoffbauer certainly, and perhaps his friend, was at the bottom of this injury to his domestic peace, and he paced the room, breathing such furious curses and vows of vengeance against the pair as fairly to alarm Portal.

'We must be prudent,' said the latter, trying to calm him. 'We must not do anything rash, vexatious as this is.'

'Yes, yes ! you are right !' cried the other, draining the glass that stood on the table. 'We must be prudent.'

We will not have our game spoiled by fools like that ! Ha ! Ha ! No ! We will have revenge, sweet revenge, delicious revenge, my friend ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !' and he laughed so fiercely and wildly that his companion thought for the moment that he had lost his senses.

'You must take a little rest, Ledru' said he, thinking that it was best not to excite him more by talking. 'Take my advice and get to bed and don't worry yourself unnecessarily. I shall call to-morrow and then you will tell me what news you have got ; for you are sure to hear soon', and he bade him good night, and went away feeling a good deal disturbed at his associate's excited condition of mind.

'What a miserable thing it is to be a sot !' said he to himself. 'Thank goodness I am guiltless of that weakness ! If I could only get clear again I would marry Joana Mallgace and her five thousand pounds and settle down quietly at Lidfield. I think I'll make a clean breast of my difficulties to the governor ; he is sure to come round in the end, and I'm tired of this silly racketting life. I will certainly have nothing more to do with this madman Ledru, if I can only back out of it. He has drunk his brains away and is positively dangerous. There's no knowing what he may not lead one into. No ! I'll cut the connection as soon as I can. This sort of life doesn't pay.'

As he turned into the Strand on his way home, he found it thronged with an excited crowd, some of whom were gathered in little groups talking loudly together, while others were congregated round each street lamp, trying to read newspapers which two or three eagerly scanned together, and then passed on to others who waited impatiently for them. An extraordinary Gazette

had been published on account of the victory of the Alma, which the Lord Mayor, after announcing it at the Sheriff's dinner, had proclaimed from the Royal Exchange. In all the theatres, managers had made known the good news to their audiences, and the whole city was carried away by prevailing enthusiasm. Porta could not help being a little infected by the general feeling, and for the time forgot Reuben Ledru, and his affairs. On going again, however, as soon as he was able, to see the latter, he was told that he had gone away for a month, but had left no address, and that all communications to him must still be addressed to the Café Frankfurt.

CHAPTER III.

At Otterstone Hall.

A brave old house ! a garden full of bees,
Large dropping poppies, and queen hollihocks,
With butterflies for crowns—tree peonies
And pinks and goldilocks.—JEAN INGELow.



ON the morning after its proclamation in the Metropolis,—which happened to be that of the Sunday set apart for the Harvest Thanksgiving,—the news of the victory of the Alma was announced by the clergy in every church throughout the kingdom. Though, however, it produced a general feeling of thankfulness and exultation, it also caused the keenest anxiety among the members of many an English home, and in one at least of Mr. Bowersby's congregation at Otterstone, it raised these conflicting emotions.

Wilfrid Oakburne, seated by the man who now owned the broad lands which had once belonged to his own race, found himself worshipping for the first time in a church built in the far off past chiefly through the bounty of his ancestors, whose remains had been laid to rest in the sacred ground around it, and whose memory was recorded in many an ancient inscription on its walls. He could not but recall how he and Reginald, scarce two years ago, had visited this place for which he knew his brother felt such affectionate veneration, and had first met the preacher who was impressing on them the solemn lessons to be learnt from this great victory. The

memorable morning service filled him, as it did so many others that beautiful September day, with many affectionate memories and vague forebodings of evil.

Neither Oakburne nor his friend Hoffbauer were aware of the fact that the invitation to Otterstone Hall which they received from Walter Chessington was in great measure due to the opposition, which his uncle Lord Ashleigh had made to their coming. The latter had always disliked his nephew's notice of Hoffbauer, which he considered an evidence of his weakness of character. 'Saved your life, my boy,' he would say, 'what of that? Didn't you repay him by saving his in return? and a most generous thing on your part,—a man in your position! Let the matter end there. Take my advice and avoid becoming intimate with people of that kind or making protégés of them. That mistaken charity don't pay Walter, and you don't know where it will lead you. Never forget the difference in station between you my dear fellow. You have behaved most admirably in the matter hitherto. Be content with what you've done and let him look after himself now.' When therefore Walter told him one morning that since his marriage and return to Parliament he had begun to find that, what with the management of his property and his duties as a magistrate, he required a secretary to assist him in transacting his business, and thought of employing Hoffbauer in that capacity, Lord Ashleigh was extremely disgusted, and did all he could to dissuade him from his project. He laughed at the plausible excuse of Walter's requiring a secretary, and repeated his warnings against patronising a man of whom he could know so little. It so happened however that his remonstrances rather offended his nephew who was beginning to grow touchy as to any

interference, and his uncle, seeing that they only strengthened his intentions with regard to Hoffbauer, like a wise diplomatist tried the effect of completely changing his front and pretending to be persuaded that after all his scruples were foolish and old fashioned, and that it was right that Walter should obey the dictates of 'his own kind heart.'

'Yes! obey the promptings of your own kind heart my boy! They do you credit. Your friend Hornblower, (Hoffbauer I mean), is a good enough fellow, I dare say. I shan't see them, by the way, as I go to Homburg next week,—that is unless the office of secretary to your worship is made permanent. Only remember, don't make too much of him.'

'No fear of that!' said Walter laughing, and the pair parted as good friends as ever.

No better means of successfully combating his nephew's plans could have been devised than this seeming acquiescence of Lord Ashleigh's. It threw him completely on himself and aroused numberless scruples that had lain dormant while his pride was in arms against his uncle. His mother, Lady Adela, had, as usual, been brought round to her brother's opinion, and her feeling in the matter made him hesitate still more. After his uncle's departure his reluctance increased, and had it not been for his wife and sister, who began to laugh at him for postponing his friend's visit so constantly, he would probably never have invited them at all.

For all that such cases are of very common occurrence, it is a melancholy thing to have to record the fact that the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Walter Chessington had not turned out quite as happily as could be desired, or as might perhaps have been fairly anticipated. While

Walter had never been very much in love with Miss Elkfield, who had, so to speak, been suggested to him as a wife by his uncle, she for her part had never really loved her husband at all before their marriage, but had merely liked him and acquiesced in the idea. Naturally imperious and self-willed, she was, though very warm-hearted, also somewhat quick-tempered, and her husband's yielding disposition and love of conciliating everybody constantly irritated her, while his forbearance and invariable good humour increased the irritation ; for what disconcerts an angry man or woman more than the refusal of the person with whom they want to quarrel to lose his or her temper ? Just now the chief cause of Mrs. Chessington's dissatisfaction with her husband was his constant obedience to all his uncle's wishes and advice. Though she was personally very well inclined towards the latter, and like most of her sex ready to own that he was a very pleasant person, she could not bear that her lord and master should be *managed* by him. She considered that Walter did not sufficiently assert himself as owner of Otterstone, and in her heart of hearts began to despise him as wanting in resolution and energy. This led her, by way of increasing that strength of will in which she deemed him deficient, to attack him constantly with those shafts of thinly veiled sarcasm which a clever woman can use with such effect, inflicting painful wounds which none but those who know each other most intimately are able to give. Fortunately Beatrice had taken a real liking both for Lady Adela and Catherine, and was very glad that they should still continue to inhabit Otterstone Hall. Lady Adela was of a still more yielding nature than her son, and willingly surrendered many of her prerogatives to Walter's imperious bride. Miss

Chessington had at first been perhaps a little inclined to be jealous of her new sister, but this feeling soon gave way to one of genuine affection on both sides, and thus the three ladies managed to live very harmoniously together. This, however, was not altogether an unmixed happiness to the young owner of Otterstone. His sister, like his wife, strongly disapproved of Lord Ashleigh's tendency to govern everybody, and also like her, secretly considered her brother wanting in spirit; so the two being of the same mind on most subjects acted together, and at last by their stronger wills led Lady Adela, against her own inclinations very often, to think as they did. Poor Chessington therefore began to find himself falling under petticoat government, and being too fond of a quiet life to be always asserting his authority, began more and more to seek distractions abroad in order to avoid unpleasant little differences at home. In London, business, pleasure, and one thing and another, prevented the society of his womankind from being oppressive to him, and it was in the country, where he began to feel that the pursuits of the ladies, and their perpetual talk about local trifles, bored him, that gradually a little estrangement sprang up between him and them. His uncle, who sympathised with him and had no very strong opinion of feminine influence, usually sided with him in the little discussions which arose, and this, and Walter's above-mentioned acquiescence in most of Lord Ashleigh's suggestions, made Mrs. Chessington and her sister-in-law hail with delight the difference between the pair respecting Hoffbauer, and encourage Walter to have his own way in the matter. Catherine, who had grown to be rather fond of her uncle, was just now all the more inclined to resent his constant

opposition to the wishes of the female portion of the household, because to humour him she had gone to London with her mother in the season, and tried to be civil to fast young men, to girls with whom she had no taste in common, and even to old dowagers, whom she pronounced 'horrid,' and whom her brother laughingly described, in the lines of the poet Rogers on the palaces of Venice—

‘The fronts of some, though time had shattered them,
Still glowing with the richest hues of art.’

So these two gave Walter no peace till he had carried his resolution into effect, and towards the end of September Wilfrid and his friend arrived at Otterstone and found assembled to meet them Lady Cynthia Rowan-court, a maiden sister of Lady Adela Chessington's, Mr. Sprott, an elderly M.P., supposed once to have admired Lady Cynthia, and celebrated for his powers of going to sleep in the House of Commons, Heron Fowler, a college friend of Walter's, much addicted to field sports, but prevented in a great measure by want of means from the enjoyment of them, and a Miss Walzingmore, the daughter of a neighbouring squire and a great friend of Miss Chessington's.

Wilfrid Oakburne, though he felt some reluctance at thus meeting his old flame, was glad of this opportunity of seeing Otterstone Hall, and at the same time making himself useful to his friend Hoffbauer ; and Mr. Throckmorton, who had invited him to visit him in Scotland later on, happening to be also staying near the adjacent town of Thornbury where a relative of Wilfrid's resided, it was arranged that they should meet there at the conclusion of Oakburne's visit and go northwards together.

As for Theodore Hoffbauer he proposed to enter on his new duties with an amount of zeal and eagerness which would have been amusing even in a younger man, and which considerably diverted his companion. When, two days before his departure, he presented himself in Wilfrid's room, his changed appearance considerably startled the latter. He had parted with his fine flowing beard, retaining only a pair of closely-cut little mutton-chop whiskers, and had arranged himself in a high stand-up collar and garments of the latest fashion in place of the rather *nèglègè* costume which he usually affected.

'Why! what on earth have you been doing to yourself Hoffbauer!' cried he with a laugh; 'upon my word I hardly knew you at first.'

'Yes! I have adopted the clothing and manners of your country, my friend!' says the other with much dignity. 'I have myself into your English "man-of-business," your "citee-man," converted. Is it not so?' and he turned himself round for inspection, much to Wilfrid's amusement, who thought how Norton, by this time, well on his way to the Crimea, would have enjoyed chaffing their friend on his transformation.

'I think you've made a very good imitation of the sort of thing,' replied he, unable to restrain a smile. 'But what on earth made you part with that magnificent beard of yours. I wouldn't have done such a thing for any consideration.'

'My good young fren', Oakburnes, I am a cosmopolite, a world-citizen, you understand, and therefore I adopt myself ever to the situation! Yes! that beard was the flower of my sorrows, the growth of evil times, and I now cut down that emblem of misfortune! He is gone, and let us hope that better times shall follow. I am

now Englishman, English citizen.' And as he surveyed his fine figure and pleasant cheery face with much complacency in the cracked mirror over the fireplace, Oakburne owned to himself that his friend certainly had a fair excuse for his evident self-satisfaction, and looked thoroughly a gentleman.

So thought evidently most of the people they encountered on their journey, during which the big German talked incessantly, asking innumerable questions about everything. When they arrived at Otterstone he greeted Walter Chessington with alarming effusion, and would doubtless have wished to embrace him, after the manner of his countrymen, had he not been checked. He saluted the ladies with bows that were worthy of any master of the ceremonies, and altogether pleased and amused every one by his courteous manners and queer 'German English.' On his being presented to Catherine Chessington, that young lady gave a start of surprise, which made the others feel a little curious, and which she explained afterwards when the ladies had retired from the dining-room.

'I thought the picture in the gallery had come to life,' said she.

'Nonsense, Catherine! which picture?' says Lady Adela, opening her eyes.

'I know!' cried Beatrice. 'She means the one of George Chessington who was killed in India!'

'Of course I do, Beatrice! How odd that you should have noticed it too! Isn't it, mother?'

'It is strange. I see what you mean now, my dear,' replied the latter. 'He has the same sort of hair and colouring, and the eyes are set in the head in the same sort of way. Yes, there certainly is a kind of likeness,

Those sort of things are very odd, the resemblances between people of different nationalities, I mean. I recollect when we were abroad years ago, when I was quite a girl, there was a Russian Prince at Ems just like your poor dear grandfather, Lord Ashleigh. He had a sort of wart under one of the eyes just in the same way. We used to laugh, we girls! Do you remember, Cynthia?’

‘Perfectly!’ answered Lady Cynthia. ‘They used to be mistaken for each other. And then when we got to know him we found that he was gouty just like poor dear papa! It was very droll!’ and they fell to talking over their reminiscences of foreign travel.

Partly because it was the most convenient room in which to put him, and partly in order to enable him to do his work undisturbed, Chessington had placed his new secretary in the upper room of the old tower at the extremity of the house, of which mention has been made more than once in these pages. After a thorough airing and cleaning, and with suitable furniture, it made a very pleasant living room, and it was a fine sight to see Hoffbauer seated in great dignity at his writing bureau,—the same in which Lord Ashleigh had discovered those old love letters of George Chessington’s,—with a pen behind each ear, and a pile of papers and books before him. He quite startled his ‘principal,’ as he insisted on calling Walter, by his eagerness for work, and showed himself to have great aptitude for his task. He was in fact so full of zeal, and anxious to testify by all means in his power his gratitude to his ‘goot yung penevagtor,’ that the latter felt that if his energies did not grow rather less keen, it would soon become a hard task to keep them sufficiently employed. There was nothing in the least servile or cringing about

him, but he constantly showed, in a way very pleasant to notice, his sense of Chessington's kindness to him ; and his unfailing good humour soon made him a favourite with everyone at Otterstone, while his attempts to conform entirely to the manners of those around him occasioned no little amusement. On Sunday he insisted on going to church, clothed in the gorgeous garments and high black hat which he considered the correct garb for the 'Englishman, business-man ; business man but always gentlemans Oakburnes you understand.' Having but seldom if ever visited an English place of worship, he had but vague ideas of the ritual ; and having got into his head that the responses should always be loudly given, and that the word 'Amen' in particular formed an essential part of them, he took occasion to repeat it so impressively, and once or twice so out of place, that Wilfrid, who was seated by him, had to kick his shins and whisper to him that his fervour disturbed the congregation, after which he maintained a dignified silence till the close of the service.

Oakburne, on whom the German looked as his special instructor in the usages of English society, found himself enjoying his visit, to which he had not looked forward with any great anticipations of pleasure, very much indeed. Beatrice Chessington was not slow to notice that the young doctor who had gained a distinguished degree and written several clever scientific articles, was a very different creature to the idle, love sick Wilfrid Oakburne of Lidfield, and that he was much improved by his hard work and private trials, which had given him a grave self-possessed manner that made him seem older than he really was. His hosts and fellow guests took a liking to him as a good-natured, clever, unobtrusive young fellow,

and Lady Cynthia Rowancourt, who had a good deal of the pride of birth, and was somewhat formal and stately in manner, was pleased to tell her sister that she thought him a very agreeable and presentable young fellow. 'And I think it is a very satisfactory thing, my dear Adela,' continued she, 'to reflect that gentlemen do enter the medical profession, which is such an important one for all of us. I am sure it was not often the case in our day.' Her ladyship being rather an invalid, had a natural leaning towards medicine, and perhaps thought that Wilfrid would make a pleasant medical-man-in-ordinary for herself. 'This gnädige frau Zynthia, this Laty Rowangort, will make you her physician of state, my young fren !' said Hoffbauer, who liked to rally him on such subjects. 'It is a pity, my boy, that she shall be no longer young laty, and that you are not of higher estate, that you might espouse her? eh? Is it not so? But you prefer without doubt the two *mädchen* this Fraulein Valzingmore, and this pretty Mees Catherina !'

The latter young lady told Walter and Beatrice that Dr. Oakburne really seemed 'very nice' after all, which showed how absurd her uncle Giles' prejudices were, on which Walter, glancing at his wife with a queer little smile, asked his sister if she didn't think he was a little melancholy, and looked as if he had been crossed in love ; and it is probable that Mrs. Chessington gave her afterwards some further particulars concerning 'young Dr. Oakburne,' which gave him an increased interest in her eyes.

It is not necessary to attempt to analyse the feelings with which Wilfrid and Beatrice met again after all their loves and jealousies, their half reconciliations and further

misunderstandings, had been conclusively set at rest. That some little pain and regret was experienced by both can well be imagined, but their own good principle and the change of feelings which each had undergone enabled them to regard the barrier which fate had raised between them with perfect equanimity. Walter Chessington, who knew all that had passed between them, was so kindly and generous in his treatment of his unsuccessful rival as speedily to win his esteem. He evidently wished to make a friend of him, and his wife could not but admire his conduct, and own that no man could have a better heart than her husband. No! No one! Only—and she thought with a little sigh how discontented we all are.

Certainly whatever might be his faults, everyone, including Mrs. Chessington, admitted that Walter was a perfect host. Somehow everything contributed to make this gathering at Otterstone pleasant to all assembled there. Sport was good, and everybody was in a good humour with his neighbour. Hence when Lord Ashleigh wrote to say that he found it necessary for his health to remain at Homburg instead of returning, as he had intended, to slaughter the pheasants, Wilfrid, and Walter's college friend, Heron Fowler, and Mr. Sprott the member for Grubbingham, were all easily induced to stay on for the massacre of those ill-fated birds, and no more contented and cheery party ever assembled in a country house, or took part more gladly in the various recreations of that pleasant phase of existence, until an event occurred which suddenly changed all their happiness into gloom.

CHAPTER IV.

Is chiefly conversational.

God made the country, and man made the town.
What wonder then, that health and virtue, gifts
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught
That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least be threaten'd in the fields and groves ?

—COWPER.

MISS CHESSINGTON,' said Hoffbauer one morning at breakfast—'Miss Chessington, I beg to tell you that I have this morning met a being very wonderful ; the most wonderful, upon my honour, that I yet in England meet with. Yes ! yes ! Nothing like him anywhere else I am sure ! Nothing !'

'And who is he, Herr Hoffbauer ?' asked Catherine, while the rest listened in some amusement.

'Who is he ? That can I not tell you. I think you shall tell me that—yes ! I will describe him for you, *fraulein*. Well now ! he shall be a youth of perhaps eighteen or nineteen—perhaps more, but he has the look to be younger. He shall be the height of Herr Mister Sprott, but not so *grosz*.'

Mr. Sprott, a stout, burly gentleman, looked rather disconcerted.

'You mean not so big,' said Walter.

'Yes, I thank you. That is the word. No so pig. This shall be a very thin mans, with the hair black, long

—very long on his shoulders—and very tirty,—pardon me that I used this word,—very tirty and close together, like the hair of the dog Carlo.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Miss Walzingham, with a laugh in which all joined, ‘he means matted, uncombed!’

‘Neglected, unkempt!’ suggests Mr. Fowler, who is sitting next to that young lady.

‘That is so, *fraulein*. I thank you,’ says Hoffbauer, with a bow. ‘That is the description of my gentlemen. And his face is ach! *schrecklich!* horrible! with a cunning sly look that shall yet seem almost silly.’

‘And he had very high shoulders and a very red face with little narrow green eyes? and he made a curious noise when you spoke to him?’ asked Catherine. ‘I know who it is then! You mean Neddy Bolton.’

‘Yes!’ continued Hoffbauer eagerly. ‘He has produced sounds the most extraordinary that it is my fortune up to this time to hear ever anywhere. I was making my morning stroll among the trees towards the water, when, of a sudden, I see my gentlemen near the big oak tree, filling up as it seems to me, a hole in the ground.’

‘What on earth could Neddy have been doing there!’ says Lady Adela.

‘I have asked him myself just this very question, *gnadige frau*,’ answered Hoffbauer. ‘I say to him, “Hola! rascal! what business shalt thou have thus kneeling here?” And when he sees me approach he jumps up on his feet, and he grins at me, and shakes the fist, and makes—oh! so *ein sonderbares Getöse!* such a most astounding sound in his anger! I cannot explain it; it is “Ahwur, ahwur, wah! wah!” and so forth!’

Everybody burst out laughing at Hoffbauer’s description, which was delivered with a good deal of gesticula-

tion, to explain his deficiencies in English. When the mirth had ceased Miss Chessington enlightened the puzzled German.

‘It was Neddy Bolton, Herr Hoffbauer. He is an idiot,—not quite in possession of all his faculties, you know. Poor fellow! it is a very sad case! His father is dead, and he lives with his mother and his old grandfather. He is quite harmless I believe, but he often does most extraordinary things. He nearly drowned himself the other day.’

‘I don’t believe he is as harmless as you think, Catherine,’ said her brother. ‘I strongly suspect him of pilfering, and I have told Robbins to keep a sharp look out on him.’ Robbins was the policeman of Otterstone.

‘I don’t think that, Walter. I am sure old Bolton and his mother look after him most carefully, but I think the boys tease him, and he gets into bad company sometimes. Old Mrs. Parrott told me he’d been seen with two very nasty looking men in the Thornbury Road. They must have been tramps.’

‘There are a good deal too many of these ugly customers about,’ remarked Walter. ‘Vagrancy is certainly on the increase.’

‘Indeed it is,’ said Lady Cynthia, ‘and I think you as a magistrate should do something, Walter, with your fellow magistrates, to watch these people. Your mother and I passed two horrid looking creatures as we were driving into Thornbury the day before yesterday. Didn’t we Adela? They made one feel quite alarmed. Do you remember?’

‘Perfectly dear! They make me feel quite uncomfortable,’ answered her sister.

Mr. Sprott observes that there is a great deal of diffi-

culty in getting work just now. 'Even tramps must live, Lady Cynthia,' says he good-humouredly.

'Of course there is no denying that, Mr. Sprott. But that class of people require to be looked after. How sad to think there is so much distress! Adela, dear, you forgot to give me any cream.' And her ladyship sighs, and remarks to her neighbour, Dr. Oakburne, that she has been recommended always to take plenty of cream, to which he of course replies that cream is a most excellent and nourishing thing.

'I think the magistrates are most energetic here!' says Beatrice, standing up for her husband. 'I am sure in Hillshire things are much worse, aren't they, Dr. Oakburne? Don't you remember what a lot of roughs there used to be in Lidfield on market days? Though of course Lidfield is a town.'

Wilfrid, who has good reason to recollect the roughs of his native place, agrees that of course that makes a great difference.

'I shall think, Mees Chessington, that it will be the venerable grandfather who came up and carried away my young friend the idiot,' resumed Hoffbauer. 'As I have been wondering what I shall do with this strange fellow, a tall old man, with the hair very white, comes hobbling across the Park from the gate by the Thornbury Road, and gives this Neddy a blow on the ear and makes him an angry discourse, which causes the poor fellow to weep, and give out cries worse than ever! Oh *schrecklich!* I assure you!' and he laughed at the recollection.

'Yes, that was old Bolton,' said Miss Chessington. 'I suppose he had missed his grandson and come to look after him.'

‘ So said this old Bolton, *fraulein*. “ I ’ope he’s not give you troubles, Mister George ! ” said he. He called me Mister George, upon my honour ! Why, I cannot tell you. I reply, “ Oh, my friend ! no trouble at all. All right—yes ! ” ’

‘ And then he led Neddy back, I suppose ? ’

‘ Yes ! but first he makes me the salute and smiles with a smile quite pleased and joyous, and says to me— “ You’re back again, Mister George. Been away long time now, sir ! Glad to see you looking so well again, sir, and so will some one else be, sir ! ” “ My good fren,” I respond to him, “ My good fren’ I am no Mister George ! I am Herr Hoffbauer, the segretary of Mister Waltaire Chessington ! ” “ Oh ah ! ” he says, looking foolish ; “ Oh ah ! Mister Walter, to be sure ! Good morning, Mister Walter, sir. I beg your pardon. I’m an old man now. I thought it was the other.” With that he goes away, mumbling and holding his boy by the ear, and I promise you I have laughed very much over this affair, Mees Chessington ! ’

‘ I think he sometimes mistakes my brother for George Chessington, my great uncle, you know, who died in India. Bolton was his servant, and a private in his regiment, and old Sir Pelham made a great deal of him when he came back, because he had been with him when he was killed. ’

‘ Yes, yes ! Mees Chessington, I know ! Familiee ’istory ! I understand ! ’ said Hoffbauer rather hastily.

‘ Yes ! it is a sad story. George Chessington quarrelled with his father, Sir Pelham, you know, and got killed at the siege of Kistnagherry in India, and so they never met again. Poor Bolton is very old, and I fear his brain is going now. He does not know me sometimes, and

he often forgets other people who don't see so much of him as I do.'

'He's only a degree better than his grandson Neddy,' remarked Lady Adela, who sometimes got tired of her daughter's *protégés*.

'The idiot grandsire of an idiot boy,' suggested Walter, and then the arrival of the post-bag interrupted further discussion on the subject of the mental powers of the Bolton family.

What a difference there is in the feelings with which the various members of such a party view the arrival of Her Majesty's mail! Walter Chessington and Mr Sprott, who had both had some experience of what it is to be overwhelmed with correspondence, would have been well content if the letter-bag had brought them nothing; but, of the rest of those assembled at the breakfast table, those who got no letters felt rather injured than otherwise at the luck of their neighbours. It happened, however, that the morning's budget was unusually large, and that very few of them were thus disappointed.

Miss Walzingmore informs Catherine that she has received a letter telling her that she must positively return home next Tuesday; on which the latter exclaims that her family 'are most selfish, dear Cecilia, to ask such a thing,' and the countenance of Mr. Fowler falls so manifestly, that the ladies of the party who have noticed, as they think, 'something coming on' between the pair, exchange meaning little smiles. Poor Fowler himself has received two claims, one of which from the landlord of his chambers in Grays Inn must be met at once, and Wilfrid has had letters both from his brother and his friend Norton, giving accounts of the battle of Alma.

Reginald, whose regiment formed part of the 2nd Division, led by Sir De Lacy Evans, told how they had crossed the river under the murderous fire of the Russian batteries, and how fierce had been the struggle among the vineyards till the arrival of the two guns, which Lord Raglan ordered to be brought up to the now celebrated Knoll, had completely changed the fortune of the day. Though his chin strap had been shot off and his belt torn, he had only received a slight wound in his left hand, and he related two or three miraculous escapes of men and officers similar to his own. Dr. Norton, who had smelt powder for the first time on this occasion, naturally dwelt more on matters relating to his own branch of the profession, describing the terrible slaughter, especially among the light division, and the noble manner in which the navy had assisted in the work of carrying the wounded to the ships. He told how several hundred wounded Russians had been sent in the transport 'Avon' to Odessa ; how the Allies had without distinction or creed, buried men of all the four nations, and conveyed the wounded of every nationality to Constantinople ; and how Dr. Thomson of the 44th and his servant, had been left alone, undefended, and unarmed in an enemy's country to tend that enemy's wounded who, but for Lord Raglan, might have been left to rot on the ground.

Details such as these seem tame enough now, but in those days, when the whole nation was eagerly watching the progress of the army, in the safety of which so many households in England were so deeply interested, letters of this kind were read with avidity by all, and the party at Otterstone were no exception to the rule, and looked

on Oakburne as a fortunate man for having such correspondents.

‘Mater es, Alma, necis ; partæ sed sanguine nostro
Pacis tu nutrix, Almaque mater eris,’

said the host, breaking the silence which had followed the reading of Norton’s letter, by quoting one of those fragments of classical scholarship on the battle which appeared in the papers of that day. ‘To me that account of Dr. Thomson is the best bit of news I have heard yet during the war. If there were more of that spirit, “Alma Pacis nutrix eris,” the battle of the Alma might really have been the foundation of peace.’

Lady Cynthia tells her nephew that he should not quote Latin before ladies, and Miss Walzingmore asks Mr. Fowler to translate the quotation for her, which he is of course delighted to do.

‘For my part,’ says Miss Chessington, who has shewn two or three little symptoms of emotion during the account of the sufferings of the soldiers, ‘For my part I think the finest piece of news is how Sir Colin Campbell told the Highlanders that he wanted them to do him the favour not to fire till they got to the redoubt, in order that he might feel justified in asking the Queen to allow them to wear the bonnet.’

‘I quite agree with you, dear !’ cries her sister-in-law ; and all the ladies say ‘Yes ! it was most gallant of him !’ at which the gentlemen all laugh.

Fowler suggests that it is the idea of ‘*bonnets*’ which makes the ladies admire the incident so much ; on which Mr. Spratt says that the ladies’ sympathies had already been enlisted in favour of the Highlanders on account of their petticoats, with something jocular about petticoat government which much amuses Lady Cynthia.

‘I particularly admire my sister’s heroic ferocity!’ says Walter Chessington, ‘for she almost goes into a fit if anyone fires a gun within twenty yards of her,—yes, you know you do, and my wife is just as bad,—and the sight of a wounded hare or partridge invariably moves her to tears.’

‘What nonsense, Walter!’ cries the young lady, and the party rises while Mr. Sprott is telling Oakburne that his ‘confounded constituents insist on my going down to Grubbingham at the end of the month to give them a little speechifying;’—a process which he really enjoys, but, by his artful affectation of disgust, leads Wilfrid to imagine that he hates, and so draws from him sundry useless expressions of sympathy for his ‘trying duties.’

Wilfrid noticed that Hoffbauer had also received a letter, and that it had caused him to start and frown as he read the superscription, after which he had carefully placed it in his pocket unopened.

‘I desire that you shall come to my room to converse with me this evenings my fren,’ said Theodore to him as they left the room. ‘We shall smoke the cigar together when the others shall have retired, and I shall tell thee something of news.’

‘What about?’ asked Wilfrid.

‘That will I explain when the time shall come,’ says the other significantly! I wish that thou shalt give me the advice as to something, my Vilfrid!’ and he went off to his secretarial work.

The day passed much as other days had done. The cloudless sky and bright sunshine, made it seem a positive duty to spend as much time in the open air as possible. The four gentlemen, in company with two friends

from the neighbourhood invited for the purpose, went out shooting, but somehow Fowler, usually such a good shot, could not hit anything on this occasion, and at length declared his intention of going home to get through some necessary correspondence. Wilfrid had also letters to write, and so the pair returned together after some friendly chaff from Mr. Sprott. Though his age equalled both of theirs put together, the latter never missed anything and never got tired, and he professed to disbelieve in the correspondence, and hinted at other attractions.

It was a still, sleepy sort of day, and the atmosphere and the influence of tobacco made both of them disinclined to conversation.

‘Hallo! who the deuce is that!’ cried Fowler suddenly, breaking the reverie into which they had fallen.

They had been crossing some of those very fields which Reginald and his brother had gone through on the day of their memorable walk from Otterstone to Draxton, and were nearing the Thornbury Road which there skirts the upper side of the park. Wilfrid, recalling the occasion, was lazily wondering what they were probably doing in the Crimea at that moment. Fowler was thinking of his debts, his want of briefs, and what a nice sort of girl Miss Walzingmore was, when his attention was attracted by the sight of three men close to the park paling, two of whom had clambered up and were gesticulating and talking together evidently about something in the grounds. ‘What on earth are they doing!’ repeated he.

As Oakburne and his companion approached, the man who remained in the road perceived them and warned

his companions, who instantly descended with great alacrity, and set off walking at a smart pace.

‘Hi ! stop ! what are you doing there ?’ cried Wilfrid.

The shortest man of the three faced about, shook his fist at them, and shouted—‘Ah wur ! ah wur ! ah, ah ! Wah ! ahwur !’

‘It is the idiot !’ said Oakburne laughing, and remembering Hoffbauer’s description of these strange utterances.

‘Idiot grandson of an idiot grandsire, as Chessington called him,’ said Fowler. ‘Yes ! no doubt it is. But I wonder who the others are. I don’t like the looks of them. Eh, Oakburne ?’

‘Let us give chase !’ suggested Wilfrid, and they walked after them.

The men were getting over the ground at a good rate, but their pursuers slowly but surely overtook them, till at last they all three stopped abruptly as if by agreement, and one of them, a stout black-bearded man, shouted out :—‘What are you following us for ?’

Wilfrid, directly he did so, thought that he recognized the face, which was coarse, bloated, and extremely repulsive. The man had a foreign, rather Jewish look, and spoke with a slightly foreign accent. Where could he have seen him ? ‘Why are you following us ?’ repeated the fellow, ‘we are not doing harm !’

‘What were you doing by the park fence ?’ asked Fowler.

‘We were doing no harm, sir,’ said the taller of his companions, who was of a much more prepossessing appearance, but whose pronunciation also showed that he was not an Englishman. ‘We are strangers. This gentleman,’ pointing to the idiot, ‘is showing us the way

to Grendon, and we have desired solely to see what is inside this park, that is all—on my word.'

'Wah! wah! Ahwur! ahwur! Ah! ah! ah!'

chattered the idiot, grinning and looking very pleased, while the black-bearded man repeated rather surlily, that 'they had been doing no harm, and that there was no call to follow them.' The way in which he said the words gave the idea that he was trying to act a part, and together with his appearance, inspired both Fowler and Oakburne with dislike and distrust. Still the story seemed plausible enough, and they could not well contradict it.

'Well,' said Wilfrid, 'I hope that's true! But I advise you not to go clambering about gentlemen's park walls or you'll have the police looking after you. You've got three good miles yet to go to Grendon.' Grendon was a neighbouring village where there were three or four big farms to which wandering Irish, and all sorts of tramps, resorted in harvest time, and though the harvest was over it was possible these two men might be the remains of a batch of such wanderers.

'You seem to be foreigners,' said Fowler, 'but I advise you to take this gentleman's advice and avoid trespassing, or, as he says, you are likely to get into trouble with the police. Good day to you.'

'Wah! wah! wah! ah!'

repeated the idiot, evidently still in high good-humour; and the men, with a 'Thank you, sir,' and 'Good morning!' went on their road, leaving the two gentlemen to return to Otterstone.

'I suppose it's all right,' said Oakburne.

'Oh yes! sure to be!' returned the other, 'still there was no harm in looking after them. What a nuisance an idiot must be about a place! Very sad that sort of

thing ; and it's wonderful how women always seem to have a special pity for it. There's a creature of that sort at home that my mother and sisters look after, almost as if he belonged to them, don't you know. And Miss Walzingmore was telling me this morning of one at their place, near this.'

'I expect every village has its pet cripple or deformity,' said Wilfrid. 'It is very sad and very mysterious,—an existence like that, apparently so useless and unhappy. Look there is Robbins ! I'll just tell him that we saw these men,' and he mentioned what had occurred to the policeman, who of course grinned, touched his hat, and said he'd 'be sure to look 'arter it.'

In the evening, after the ladies had retired, Wilfrid, mindful of his promise to Hoffbauer, took advantage of a somewhat ardent discussion between Walter Chessington and Mr. Spratt, on the policy of the Government in persisting with the Reform Bill, to leave the smoking room early, and repair to his friend's sanctum. What he learned there must be told in a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER V.

Retribution.

Life ! we've been long together
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather ;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear ;
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear ;
Then steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time,
Say not ' Good Night,' but in some brighter clime
Bid me ' Good Morning '.—MRS. BARBAULD.



WILFRID OAKBURNE felt far more inclined for bed than for conversation as he ascended the stone staircase leading to his friend's room in the tower. To him the day, though pleasant enough, had seemed a trifle monotonous, but for his friend Hoffbauer it had been full of life and excitement. The latter's meeting in the morning with old Bolton and his idiot grandson, which he had recounted to Miss Chessington at breakfast, had awakened in him a new and stirring train of thought. Why had this old Bolton called him Mr. George? He knew,—for two or three people had remarked it,—that there was a singular likeness between himself and the portrait of that George Chessington who had died in India, and with whose history he was now perfectly acquainted, though he had affected to take no interest in it. He had not told the party at breakfast that the old fellow had shaken him by the hand and

said, 'I've been expecting you a long time, Mr. George, and you've come at last, but I know a lady that'll be more pleased than I am,' and he had altered the story from a feeling which he could hardly explain to himself. Constantly pondering, as he had now been for months, on the history of the unfortunate Estelle Chessington, it was only natural that he should be deeply impressed by the strange coincidence of learning at this house the history of an officer whose description tallied so remarkably with that of the man supposed to be his grandfather. Gradually the conviction had been growing in his mind that he had at last found the Chessington he had been longing to discover. Had not Estelle Chessington, previous to her going to Paris, earned her livelihood as a governess in the house of a family in England? Had she not there met the young English officer who had betrayed her, and whose name she had adopted? Often of late he had told himself that Otterstone Hall must have been the house, and that the officer could be no other than George Chessington, and the adventure of the morning served still further to convince him that he was right. This old soldier servant, Bolton, had evidently mistaken him for his dead master, and his allusion to the 'lady who would be more pleased' than he was, seemed to Hoffbauer to imply that he was acquainted with the secret of the connection between her and George Chessington; for why should not Estelle Chessington have been that lady? His duties prevented him from pushing his enquiries further just now, but he determined to question Bolton on the first opportunity. Yes! he was gradually getting to the truth of this mystery. He felt convinced of it. Of course if all his surmises were correct, there would still be no proof of a marriage

between his ill-fated relative and George Chessington, his mother would still bear the stain of illegitimacy ; but nevertheless, if true, they would prove that he was in a manner the cousin of the young owner of Otterstone Hall. And perhaps,—was it not possible?—Bolton might even have some knowledge which would show the marriage ceremony between the pair to have been genuine after all.

Such was the train of reasoning which had occupied his mind all day, and the thoughts it suggested would alone have served to prevent him from finding it dull. In addition to this, however, he had received that morning a letter from Madam Ledru, which helped still further to stimulate his mental activity. It was therefore on these two subjects that he wished to talk with Wilfrid Oakburne, and they made him so preoccupied that he found it difficult to settle down to anything till the time arrived that he had appointed for doing so.

He had come to his room as soon as dinner was over with the object of doing some work. He lighted his fire, arranged his papers, and sat down before them, but when he tried to write, his thoughts reverted so persistently to the dominant idea which occupied them, that he gave up the attempt as useless, and rising from the bureau went and stood at the fire. As has been said, the bureau was the same piece of furniture in which Lord Ashleigh had discovered George Chessington's letters, and had been very handsomely done up in a way which made the 'good mahogany,' he had then pronounced it to be, appear to the best advantage. The drawer was now no longer a secret one, and was full of correspondence of a very different character—letters from Walter Chessington's agents, and from members of his Election Committee at

Lidfield, and other documents of a similar business-like nature. Had he known the sentimental matter it contained when Lord Ashleigh brought it to light by that random stroke of his cane, Hoffbauer would no doubt have looked at it with more interest. As it was, however, he merely noticed that it was open, and that the bundle of papers in it required arranging. He stepped up to put them in order, and as he did so the thought suddenly struck him that it was odd that there should be a drawer on this side of the bureau and not on the other. It was very odd. He closed it and noticed that when shut it would have been indistinguishable from the rest of the woodwork had it not been for a little ivory button which had evidently been newly put there by way of a handle. It was a strange place for a drawer, and it was also singular that as the maker had chosen to put one there he had not, for the sake of symmetry, made a corresponding one on the opposite side. But there was nothing; no sign of a drawer.

‘It is very peculiar!’ cried he aloud! ‘Very!’ and he began tapping with a ruler the place where the other drawer should have been. ‘Hein! Stay! It sounds hollow. Yes! without doubt it is hollow!’ and he rapped again, listening carefully. ‘Ha! Donnerwetter! What is this!’

Bang! There is a sound of a sharp crack, something like the report of a tiny pistol, and out springs the corresponding secret drawer. This *is* a discovery! What is in it! Papers. Surely he may look at them? He glances round furtively, but all is still as the grave. Hush! What was that! Psha! it was only a rat underneath the boarding where the trap door was. He had heard them a good deal during the last few days.

Yes ! he must read them ! and he takes out of the drawer a yellow looking parchment together with a letter written in a clear female hand. He unfolds the parchment. What is this ! His heart beats quickly, his head seems to swim, and he gives vent to a sudden cry of mingled surprise and delight. It is a copy of the parish register of Rolhill Church in the county of Hillshire which records a marriage celebrated by J. F. Whitworth, on the 18th March, 1788, between 'George Pelham Chessington, a lieutenant in His Majesty's — regt., of Otterstone Hall, Clayshire, and Estelle Léon, gentlewoman, daughter of Jules, Chevalier de Léon, deceased, late Captain in the — regt. of cuirassiers, and witnessed by George Bolton of Otterstone.'

Hoffbauer could hardly believe his eyes as he read this document, and when he had done so twice or thrice, he still continued to gaze at it in wonderment. It was the one bit of evidence he had been wishing so long to find. It proved that poor Estelle was really married after all, that his mother was born in lawful wedlock, and that he was the lineal descendant and sole representative of George Chessington. George Chessington was he knew the elder brother of James, his patron Walter's grandfather, and he must therefore be the real owner of this property of Otterstone Hall. Heavens ! what a discovery ! The thing might be hard to prove ; he was ignorant of the law of course ; but—but still he felt sure of it. Yes ! perfectly certain ! 'Himmel' he cried aloud, 'What a revolution in my life, in the life of my poor good young patron, may not this yellow bit of paper, so long hidden from everyone, cause—.'

'Hark ! what was that ! The rats again ! He could almost have declared he heard the trap door lifted ! So

strongly did he feel assured of this that he actually raised it and looked down. Of course it was all right. The empty space extended only down two or three feet below, for the ancient passage, which had been so useful to the Romanists in the days of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, was choked up with rubbish. Of course there was nothing. It was still only those noisy rats ; he would get a trap for them to-morrow. But the very feeling of alarm which had been roused in him served to suggest a different train of thought to his mind. What right had he to look at these papers ? Did they not belong to the owner of the house ? Of course they did, and he had no business to take them. He would tell Walter Chessington. Yes ! he would tell his kind young benefactor of this discovery, and of his own history, and be guided by his wishes on the subject. But first of all he would consult Wilfrid Oakburne about it, and,—and before putting the papers back he might just as well look at the letter. He had a perfect right to look at what concerned him so closely. So he opened it and eagerly scanned its contents.

He recognised the faded handwriting at once as the same as that of one of the letters which he had seen among the papers preserved by old Madam Rovelli. There was the same signature too : ‘ Estelle Chessington ; ’ ‘ Your loving wife, Estelle Chessington.’ It was dated the 14th March, and was written from Otterstone Hall to ‘ *ma tres chéri* George,’ telling him that the next day the writer would be ‘ leaving for ever ’ his father’s house, and that she should come to the place he had appointed in London. There was little else in it save some expressions of regret at leaving the place where she had been so happy, which had become sacred to her, because there she had first met him to whom she was

writing, and at being parted from her 'dear Isabella, whom I shall soon have the happiness of calling sister by right and not only by friendship.'

Hoffbauer had never heard of the Isabella thus affectionately referred to and, though it was clear that she must be a sister of that George Chessington whom he now believed to be his grandfather, his knowledge of the family history did not extend far enough to enable him to identify her, as the reader will have done, with the mother of Mr. Throckmorton's friend, General Beechcroft. Knowing nothing of the Beechcroft family, he did not trouble himself as to that point. It was sufficient for him that the letter was an additional testimony in confirmation of the marriage certificate, and that the couple had evidently been secretly married at Rolhill,—not Colhole, as it had been erroneously described in his grandfather's statement. He would find out all about this Rolhill, he would try and visit the place, he would question old Bolton about it,—and, as he was pacing up and down, thinking of this and a thousand other plans which had begun to suggest themselves to his excited imagination, he heard a crunching sound on the gravel below, and had just time to replace the documents in the drawer when Wilfrid knocked for admittance.

'You are late, my young fren',' said he, as the latter entered. He determined that he would talk to Wilfrid first about Frederica's business before telling him of his new discoveries. 'Sit down, Vilfrid my boy, and light the cigar. It is so cold you see that I have lighted for myself the fire. It is more kosee, as you call it in England. Is it not so?'

Wilfrid agreed that it was. 'Well! What do you want to talk to me about?' said he, noticing as he

thought, a strange and unwonted excitement in the usually easy and *nonchalant* German. 'What are these important affairs, eh?'

'Well, first of all Oakburnes, I have received a letter this morning. It is in German, so I shall not show it to you, for you do not sufficiently comprehend the *muttersprache*; but I must tell you about it, and he paused for a moment in evident hesitation.

'Well! fire away, Hoffbauer. I'm all attention. What is it?'

'To begin with, my boy,' replied the German, his face growing suddenly rather grave. 'To begin with, I have not been quick or eager to tell you, because I am not sure how you will listen. It may happen that you shall call me 'villain,' think me 'vicked,' *und so weiter*. But it is not so, oh man of stern morals! It is not that I shall be the 'villain!' But I know my boy that thy views are of the most strict,—so strict that for me, poor sinner, I shall not comprehend them!—and therefore Vilfrid I delay, you understand.'

'I don't think I'm so very strict,' said Wilfrid smiling. 'Go on with your story, Hoffbauer, and I will promise not to be too severe.

'We have known each other a long time now, Vilfrid,' replied the other still more earnestly, 'and thou hast been a kind friend to me. This is no jesting matter my boy. I desire much that thou shalt not think harshly of me in what I shall say, but listen in patience.'

'You may rely on my doing that, Hoffbauer,' answered Oakburne in some surprise. 'I am very pleased that you care to trust me, and if I can be of use I will. We are quits in friendship; and you may safely confide in me.'

‘Well, Oakburnes,’ began Theodore, speaking very slowly, and with some embarrassment. ‘Well Oakburnes, you know that there is a certain Madam Ledru who is a very dear friend of mine.’

‘Of course I do. Have I not often met her?’

‘You know also that her husband is proprietaire of the Café Frankfurt.’

Wilfrid nodded assent.

‘But you do not know that that man is my bitter enemy, the man who has ruined my life, has taken from me all that I value, and made me ten thousand times worse than I should have been!’ His face blazed with an anger so fierce that his listener, who had never seen his friend in a passion before, was rather scared, and could only murmur a vague expression of surprise and regret.

‘You do not know all my history Vilfrid,’ continued the German, rising, and pacing the room. ‘Some have I told you, but not much. It is necessary now that you know more. It is not perhaps a good history, but it is *lehrreich*, rich in lessons that it shall teach, instrugtive, eh?’ And he proceeded to tell Oakburne, as he had previously told Chessington, all that the reader has already heard concerning his intercourse with Reuben Pfeiffer, *alias* Ledru, and with Frederica and her father, his share in the disturbances at Frankfurt, Reuben’s subsequent villainies, and his meeting with Frederica in London.

‘I have been wild, reckless, selfish!’ cried he. ‘I own all my faults; but, but for this man, all would have been different. It was he who led me back to evil courses when I had kept away so long. It was he who beguiled me into these accursed rebellions, he who sold me and my comrades, whom he had deceived, for money to the

government he pretended to detest. It was he who came for ever between my love and me, who killed her father by his infernal plots and cruelties, and who, after making me an outlaw, has nearly driven her whom I should have married mad by his devilish tyrannies and wickednesses. Shall I not love this man to whom I owe this heavy debt? What do you think now that I feel towards him?’

‘He has certainly given you cause to hate him if ever man did,’ said Wilfrid; but Hoffbauer was so excited by the passion that these recollections never failed to arouse in him that he scarcely heeded the reply.

‘I come to London,’ resumed he, seating himself again opposite Wilfrid. ‘I come to London, and met my poor Frederica again,—and learn only that it is too late,—too late! She tells of all the diabolical doings of this viper, his cruelties and unfaithfulness, and tears my heart with these histories, which make me long to meet him but once, face to face, and settle our differences for ever. But still I have tried at first, Wilfrid, on my honour, to resist these feelings, to keep away. Yes! I tell you solemnly that when Herr Chessington had so helped me—before I became ill you know, Wilfrid—I tell you I had resolved, on my sacred word, to part altogether. But I declare to you that it has been impossible! Listen my friend. This villain, this accursed Reuben, has added this to his other crimes, he who always curses her, now beats her! beats her!’

‘Poor thing! Poor thing!’ cried Oakburne, ‘The man deserves to be hung! and, trust me, he will live to be yet.’

‘Ah! my friend! none but she knows what it is that life of hers, save, perhaps, I who tell you; and I know

but half. But there is worse to tell. One evening after he has quarrelled with her, and beaten and cursed her as usual, there comes to his house your friend the amiable Portal, that bright star of the profession of laws.'

'Portal!' cries Wilfrid, astonished; 'Does he know him?'

'Yes. You shall be surprised I see, but they know each other well these two worthy gentlemen,' and after telling him of Portal's suggestion to him to extort money from the young owner of Otterstone, by means of his papers, Hoffbauer went on to relate how Frederica had discovered the plot contrived by Ledru and his associate for getting possession of the money old Madam Rovelli intended to leave her, and the mode in which they purposed to make use of their knowledge of the German's claims to the name of Chessington.

'By fear of the loss of her good name,—and you my friend, who have been seen to meet her, you were also to made use of in this way,—by dread I say of this, and of injuring me, whom she so loves, this poor, innocent, soul, who has suffered so much, was to be first robbed of her inheritance, and then divorced. What do you think now my friend, eh?'

'What awful villainy!' cried Wilfrid.

'Happily Frederica was always on the look out to defeat such devil's contrivances. By good luck her suspicions were excited, and she listened;—and then she tells me. What do you think I should have done in this case? What would you have done yourself, Oakburnes? Well, I will tell you what I *have* done."

'What?'

'I told her to leave for ever this man and come to me.'

'You told her to leave her husband?'

‘Yes, young man! That is what I told her!’ cried the German fiercely. ‘But she would not, this good angel! What say you to that? She said her duty forbade her, and she would not.’

‘Surely she was right and you were wrong, Theodore.’

‘Of that there may be two opinions, my boy’ said Hoffbauer rather sternly. ‘She said she would try and bear up a little longer, for that, now that she knew of his plans, she could defeat them. And she did endure a little longer poor child, till one evening this demon of a Reuben during one of his drinking bouts, begins as usual to curse, and insult her, till he had driven her nearly mad; and then,—oh Himmel! that I could have been there!—he strikes her such a blow that she fell to the ground half stunned.’

‘Is there no punishment for such infernal villainy!’ cried Wilfrid.

‘No, my friend, if it is only your wife that you strike and she does not choose to complain,’ replied the other, laughing bitterly. ‘No! there seems to be no punishment; but this was more than my poor Frederica could bear. She came to me then;—and—and the next day, two days before you and I came to this place, I took her to—to Lidfield.’

‘Lidfield, Hoffbauer! what made you choose Lidfield?’ asked Wilfrid with manifest displeasure in his tone. He had become very grave as the story went on. Though he was very sorry for both poor Frederica and his friend, he could not help wishing that he had not been made a confidant in the matter, and this feeling of regret was changed to one of vexation and suspicion, when he heard that Madam Ledru was at Lidfield.

‘My friend you look angry,’ said Hoffbauer, with some confusion. ‘Perhaps you have reason. You care not that such as my poor Frederica should be your neighbour. Well! it is natural! But you must forgive me, for I trusted to you my Vilfrid.’

‘To me!’ said Oakburne in dismay.

‘Ah, think my boy! This poor woman has no friends! Had she gone to the house of Madam Rovelli her demon of a husband would have come and taken her back. She trembles before him. He has some strange influence of fear over her.’

‘She could have got a separation, a divorce.’

Hoffbauer coloured a little. ‘She!’ cried he impetuously. ‘She! poor girl! you little know! She has no money for that! no friends! and what does she know of your law? I tell you that was impossible! No! It could not be,—yet,—at all events. And I,—I have chosen Lidfield, because I thought to myself that if anything happens to me, I can ask Wilfrid Oakburne, who has been so good to me, to help my dear. Ah my friend can I not ask this? If it is wrong forgive me. Remember I warned you I should tell you what would perhaps shock you. But think! she is so lonely and friendless.’

Wilfrid shook his head sadly in response to this eloquent pleading.

‘Ah, my friend, consider her helpless sorrow! Listen! The day after to-morrow I procure the leave of absence from my good principal, and go to Lidfield. I must, for to-day she has written to me to go, because of her money is left so little. Wilfrid, my friend, let me tell her that in the worst she may look to you for help? Something warns me, I know not what, that she will

need thy friendship sadly one day. Say then that you forgive me! that you agree that I have done right.'

'No!' said Wilfrid decidedly. 'No! I tell you frankly Hoffbauer that I think you have done wrong. But,—Good Heavens! who am I to condemn you!' added he in great agitation. 'You have done wrong, but I would help you if I could. You know I would do so. Let me think a moment,' and he rose, and walking to the window, looked out while Hoffbauer, seated by the fire, watched him curiously.

'Himmel! it is strange this excess of conscience!' murmured the latter to himself.

'Look!' cried Oakburne suddenly. 'Look! Who can that be?' and his tone made Hoffbauer at once leave his place to see what had attracted his attention.

The window faced the grove of beeches near the river which, as has been mentioned in the earlier part of this story, was known as the glade. It was a clear bright night, and a moon nearly approaching the full, threw a flood of light upon the great stone said to commemorate the fatal duel between Sir Walter Oakburne and his friend Sir Walter Throckmorton, and made the stream, winding amongst the trees beyond gleam, like a bright band of silver.

'What shall this mean, Oakburnes?' enquired the German in some surprise. 'What do you then gaze at?'

'Did you not see him?' enquired the other with evident anxiety. 'Did you not see a man by that stone wave his hand? When I called you he was there! I could swear I saw him beckon. But now he has suddenly vanished.'

'My dear boy!' said Hoffbauer with a laugh? You are sleepy, half dreaming. It is the good claret that

makes you dream. I see nothing—positively nothing, Donnerwetter !’

‘I saw it distinctly I tell you !’ repeated the other with some warmth.

‘You have been reading this old ghost story Oakburnes my boy, and this, with the excellent wine, shall make the vision. Your thoughts are excited ; and perhaps you are too much tired. I keep you too late my dear fellow. It is selfish. Therefore go. Let us talk more to-morrow.’

‘Nonsense, Hoffbauer !’ answered Wilfrid excitedly. ‘I am not a bit tired. I saw this most distinctly I say, as plainly as I see you. A man by that stone beckoned me ! I would swear it ! And what is more, I am going to see who it is. I am not the least tired and, on the contrary, I feel as if I could not sleep. I will just walk there and reconnoitre, and then I will come back and talk with you again.’

‘You will not really go ?’

‘Upon my word I will ! Come with me. There have been suspicious people about. It will not take long, come !’

Oakburne felt impelled, by some sudden impulse he could not resist, not only to go himself, but to make his friend go too.

“My dear, Wilfrid, excuse me, but you are most unwise. If it had been as you say, should I too not have seen this man who beckons ?”

‘No ! he was only there a moment, just as I went to the window. When you came up he was gone. But *I* will go if *you* will not,’ and he moved towards the door. The whole story of the quarrel between Sir Walter Oakburne and his friend and brother-in-law came back with extraordinary freshness to his mind, and he recalled

the legend of the warning which the spirit of the former was said to give to those of his race over whom any danger impended. He was not at all superstitious, and at most times would have laughed at the idea of the legend, but on this occasion he felt such a strong conviction that he *must* go and examine the stone, that, do what he would, he could not but yield to it.

‘I shant be five minutes away,’ said he, as he opened the door; ‘and I will of course come back and finish our talk. I feel inclined to sit up all night.’

‘If you will go, go, Vilfrid!’ replied the German rather testily. ‘You shall get the cold in the head, and there shall be much laugh at the breakfast to-morrow, when I shall recount this history of you! But you *must* go, you obstinate one! So be it. I will sit here warm by the fire, while you make your cold promenade. I do not envy your heroism, my boy!’

Oakburne went out and closed the door, and Hoffbauer, taking out his precious papers once more, seated himself in the chair which the former had occupied.

‘Poor Oakburnes!’ said he to himself. ‘He is a very good fellow, but a very strange one. How foolish this escapade, because of a shadow on the grass! I shall make the peoples laugh to-morrow, silly fellow, with the account of it. It is perhaps the English nature to act thus. Ah well! I must show him this parchment of mine, and ask what he advises, for he has a good head, this Vilfrid. As for Frederica, I see he will come round in spite of the conscience. It is strange that just when I have had to recount to him my history I should have made this grand discovery which may so change it all.’

A pleasant sense of triumph and content stole over him. He was not usually given to castle-building, but

for once the fatigue of this exciting day, the comfortable arm-chair, and pleasant blaze on the hearth, disposed him to it. He placed the papers in his lap, and gazing at the fire with folded hands, fell into a reverie.

It had been an eventful life his. Plenty of storm, but yet some little sunshine. He thought of his early youth, with its happy comradeship and jovial pleasures. He lived once more the stirring life of arms, when he risked everything in the hopeless cause of so-called liberty, and recalled its brief successes, hairbreadth escapes, and joyous excitement. What a contrast to the ordinary routine of most men's existence! How the quiet life at Hallé had made him chafe and fret! And yet, how he loved that dear old home in spite of its dullness! He seemed to see it all now, the old familiar streets and buildings, and the river flowing among its wooded islands. What was that? The rats again! He was too lazy to turn round. Bother the rats! How long this foolish Wilfrid was! Should he go after him? No. He was doubtless all right, and it was pleasanter here; and he half-closed his eyes and fell to dreaming of the past again. He recalled how the spirit of the rover had first come upon him after some talk with a wild young friend, and how his restless longings to see the world had vexed his mother. Poor dear mother! she was at rest now under the green turf in the churchyard of that quiet old town, and he was an exile for life from the spot where she was buried! At rest! Blessed termination to this life of conflict, sorrow, and failure! yet her life had been in many respects happier and more fortunate than that of most women. What a contrast to poor Frederica's! Poor darling! He thought of her now, alone, an outcast, friendless among strangers, and cursed

Reuben as the cause of her sorrows. Poor darling! But for her too now there was hope, and her sad fortune might all be changed. Now that he had the prospect of prosperity, independence,—aye who knew?—perhaps even of riches and power before him, all might be changed. Might not Reuben die? yes, his vices must destroy him soon; and if he should, and if he, Hoffbauer, became wealthy and powerful, then, then . . . and a bright vision of the future rose before him in the glowing embers. Yes! Life was full of tempest and trouble, but in the end it was glorious to have lived! . . .

He must have unconsciously fallen asleep for a moment, when a noise behind him made him suddenly spring to his feet. As he did so, there was the sharp report of a pistol, and a bullet whizzed past, and lodged in the chair in which he had been sitting. Thrusting his precious documents in his breast, he turned to confront his would-be assassin, and saw before him his enemy Reuben Pfeiffer who, holding a dagger in one hand, and in the other a still smoking pistol, rushed upon him with a savage oath. Hoffbauer had just time to notice that the trap door was open, and that another man was in the room, who was busy ransacking the drawers of the bureau. But he did not heed him. All his fury was concentrated on the man before him.

‘You false villain,’ he cried. ‘You vile incarnation of all that is evil! You have crossed my path, and ruined my happiness through my whole life, and now Heaven has given you into my hands.’

He sprang at his throat, and, as he did so, Reuben discharged his second barrel, wounding him in the chest, but the next moment he was in the powerful grasp of his antagonist. The other robber turned as his fellow

villain uttered a piercing cry for help, and was preparing to rush to his assistance, when the door opened and Wilfrid Oakburne, seeing the situation at a glance, dashed at him and struck him a blow on the temple, with the stout stick he carried, that stretched him senseless on the ground. When he had satisfied himself that there was nothing further to be feared from the fellow, Wilfrid hastened to render aid to Hoffbauer, and found that the latter had thrown his enemy to the ground, and, with one hand still on his throat, was kneeling beside his motionless form. In the fall Reuben's head had been dashed with such violence against the end of the iron camp bedstead that stood in the corner of the room as to fracture his skull. He lay there with fury still glaring in his eyes, and his clenched teeth gleaming through his parted lips, an awful picture of ferocious hatred suddenly made impotent.

'He is dead !' panted Hoffbauer, who was bleeding profusely. 'He is dead, the accursed wretch ! I have had my revenge !—and Frederica !—but—'. He raised his hand to his head as he spoke, and sank fainting to the ground.

Wilfrid with difficulty managed to raise him and lay him on the bed, and, whilst he was doing so, Walter Chessington with a gun, followed by two of the men-servants, one with a pistol, another with a cudgel, hurried into the room ; and presently the other two male guests, with anything that they could lay hold of in the shape of weapons, joined them.

Oakburne speedily explained the state of things and the ruffian whom he had disabled, and who was now beginning to recover his senses, was securely bound, while one messenger was sent to the village for Robbins

the policeman, and another galloped to Thornbury for a doctor. It was quite clear that the burglars had made their entrance by the trap door, and on examination it was seen that the rubbish had been cleared away, and that the old passage, by which the Romish priests had been wont to secure their safety when hard pressed, had again been made available.

‘Hark!’ said Fowler suddenly, ‘Don’t you hear some one moaning?’

They all listened.

‘I’ll be hung if it isn’t the idiot!’ added he, ‘Don’t you recognise his infernal gibberish, Oakburne?’

Wilfrid agreed that the sounds did resemble those which the unfortunate Neddy Bolton was accustomed to utter, and it was resolved that they should examine the passage. Walter Chessington therefore descended in company with Fowler, Mr. Sprott, and one of the footmen, while Oakburne remained to tend the wounded man. There, sure enough, they found the idiot at the foot of the subterranean steps, weeping and gibbering. The servant speedily secured him, while the others, continuing their way, found that the other entrance to the passage was about a quarter of a mile distant, well concealed by a large thorn-bush that overshadowed it, which was not far from the Thornbury Road. Having thus ascertained how the burglars had gained access to the tower, the party returned, speculating much as to the motive which could have led the men to go there, and deciding that it could only be attributable to private enmity against Hoffbauer.

Meanwhile the whole household had been roused, and, with lights flitting too and fro, frightened women cowering in the doorways and passages, and busy servants

hurrying hither and thither, Otterstone Hall presented a strange scene of confusion. Oakburne's medical skill enabled him to render some assistance to his poor friend, but having no surgical instruments he could of course do but little. The bullet, striking the chest, had lodged in the shoulder, and had so injured the lungs in its passage that there was every reason to fear the wound would be fatal. Every moment the sufferer grew weaker, and it was soon apparent that there was little hope of saving his life. After a time Hefflauer began to realise this himself.

'Wilfrid,' said the poor fellow, 'I feel I have had my death wound. My friend, I beg of you my last favour. Be kind to poor Frederica when I shall die, and try to give her the help she needs. Tell her, my boy, I solemnly adjure you, how I died, and that he, that villain, has been destroyed. Tell her that we are avenged. Tell her,' he resumed, with weakened utterance, 'that my last words were to pray God bless her. Promise me.'

'Most solemnly I promise to do so, my dear friend, and to help her to the best of my power,' replied Oakburne, much affected.

'Enough. I thank you, dear Wilfrid. Now also promise me to tell nothing of the story of my life and so forth to anyone but to Chessington, and to him only if he questions. Thank you once more, my friend. And now please tell my dear patron I must speak to him before I die, to him alone, quite alone.'

Oakburne went immediately to their host to inform him of the dying man's wish, and Walter, who had been anxiously waiting for the doctor, hastened to the sick room.

On seeing him Hoffbauer seemed to gain a momentary access of strength.

‘I wish to bid thee *lebewohl*, my kind Walter,’ said he, raising himself on his arm. ‘Thou hast been one of the best of the friends of my life. Now that we must part for ever, I wish to say once more my thanks and affection!’

‘My dear Hoffbauer,’ answered Chessington, ‘you know that my debt of gratitude to you is as great as yours to me! But do not say that it is good-bye! Every moment I expect the doctor. The bullet will be easily extracted. We shall spend many happy years together, my dear friend!’

‘Never! Nevermore, Walter!’ said the other faintly, sinking back on his pillow. ‘But listen,’ he added eagerly. ‘While I have strength I must tell thee. Take these papers,’ and he drew from beneath his pillow the documents relating to the proof of his descent, together with the copy of the marriage certificate of Estelle Chessington, all of which were stained with the blood from his wound. ‘Take these, Walter,’ he repeated. ‘Read them carefully, and when thou hast done so, cast them into the flames. Thou shalt then find that they show that thou and I, dear friend, are of kin to each other.’

‘Of kin!’ ejaculated Chessington, astonished. He thought the poor fellow’s mind must be wandering.

‘Yes. We are of one family, Walter; though without doubt it shall seem strange to thee. Read them then I pray, and then destroy them; and sometimes remember me.’ His voice grew weaker, and a moan of pain escaped him.

‘My dear friend!’ cried Walter in great agitation, ‘I will do what you wish.’

Hoffbauer half raised himself once more.

‘Let me be buried here in the churchyard of Otterstone, dear Walter,’ he said, and then he sank back insensible.

At this moment there came a loud knocking at the door, and Walter, hurrying to it, brought in the surgeon who had been summoned from Thornbury.

‘I am afraid you are only just in time, doctor,’ said he, as the latter examined Hoffbauer’s wound.

‘I am afraid I am too late,’ replied the doctor, shaking his head when he had finished his scrutiny of the unconscious man. ‘It is all over now, I fear.’

They saw a bright smile pass over his face, he murmured faintly a few words of which none but Oakburne could tell the import, and then, with a deep sigh, the stormy voyage of Theodore Hoffbauer’s life ended.

CHAPTER VI.

In which Lady Felsparley asserts her authority.

The world has long been amused with the mention of policy in public transactions, and of art in private affairs ; they have been considered as the effects of great qualities, and as unattainable by men of the common level : yet I have not found many performances either of art or policy, that required such stupendous efforts of intellect, or might not have been effected by falsehood and impudence, without the assistance of any other powers.—THE RAMBLER.



It has been mentioned that Mr. Throckmorton was staying with some friends near Thornbury, a town some five miles from Otterstone, at the time when the events described in the last two chapters took place. The MS. of that gentleman, which has hitherto been always followed as closely as possible, only alludes in an incidental way to this visit. As, however, certain occurrences connected with it must be related in order to make the narrative intelligible to the reader, the present writer has been obliged to fill this awkward hiatus to the best of his power by means of a few letters in his possession, and his recollections of conversations with Mr. Throckmorton on the subject.

The correspondence of the latter with General Beechcroft after his departure for India had not, as is to be expected in such cases, been very energetically kept up. Each had his own business to occupy him, and, as neither had ever been very much given to letter writing, their communications to each other, though as warm and unreserved as ever, were rare and generally occasioned

by matters of importance. It was therefore with feelings of grave anxiety that Mr. Throckmorton read a letter he received early in the year from his friend, in which he alluded, somewhat in detail and altogether contrary to his custom, to his failing state of health, and which concluded as follows :—‘Sybil will of course at my death find a home with her aunt and natural guardian, Lady Felsparley. She will, thank God ! be tolerably provided for, now that I am getting clear of my difficulties, and the Grange will be her property. You know all my affairs Throckmorton, and it is with perfect confidence that I ask you to befriend my dear girl. You and I have, I think, never had any secrets from each other since the old Rugby days when we used to get into scrapes in company ; and I will confide to you that, though no doubt Gertrude means to be kind, Sybil does not get on well with her aunt. My sister is (alas ! that a brother should say it !) rather worldly, and is moreover hard, and unforgiving, as you Edward, if any, have cause to know. Sybil is very high-spirited, and cannot brook her interference ; perhaps it is her father’s fault, for I fear I have not had the heart to be as strict with her as I should, and therefore, perhaps, I ought not to complain of those who try to restrain her. Be this as it may, however, Sybil does not rely on her aunt Gertrude as she ought, and, in the event that she should ever be driven to take counsel of some one else, I have bid her go to you, as her guardian. This I am sure she will not hesitate to do, for you know she has always had a great affection for you, and still calls you Uncle Edward, as she did when she was a child. Forgive my burthening you thus with the duties of counsellor to a young woman. who has no claim on you save our well tried friendship,

I am content, however, boldly to rely on that. Please God you and I may yet meet again at the old place in Clay-shire, and laugh together over a glass of the old wine at my gloomy forebodings. Still I have been feeling strangely out of sorts of late and something has been urging me for some time past to write to you as I have done. We old fellows can't last for ever, and I am your senior, Edward, remember, though you were always ahead of me in the school. Let me have news from you when you are at leisure ; and I hope to hear that you are as hearty as ever, and that time has dealt more tenderly with you than with your old friend

‘RUPERT BEEHCROFT.’

This letter, which affected Mr. Throckmorton not a little, and to which we may be sure he sent by the next mail such an answer as was well calculated to comfort and cheer his friend, was the last he was ever to receive from those hands. Some two months later the papers announced the death, suddenly from heart disease, of General Rupert Beechcroft, commanding the Kurryapore Division in the ——— Presidency of India, appending to their notice the usual account of his services.

‘In General Beechcroft,’ said the *Daily Dictator* ‘the nation has lost another of those distinguished Peninsular veterans who are now disappearing so fast from among us, and whose military talents and experience it can so ill afford at the present time to spare. The deceased officer began his career in India, and was subsequently present at Corunna, where he was severely wounded. He took part in the Walcheren expedition, and served with distinction throughout the Peninsular campaigns, being present at the siege and storming of Ciudad Rodrigo, as well as at the battles of Salamanca,

(where he was twice wounded), the Pyrenees, Nivelle, Orthes, Toulouse, Quatrebras, and Waterloo. The great Duke, his commander, whose acquaintance he had the honour to enjoy, is known to have expressed a high opinion of his abilities as a soldier,' etc.

Lady Felsparley of course returned with her daughter and niece to England, and at once put herself in communication with Mr. Throckmorton, who had been appointed one of the executors of her brother's will. General Beechcroft in that document, as well as frequently during his lifetime, had expressed an earnest wish that Sybil should live with her aunt and cousin; and as 'Thornbury Grange,' a small property near the town of that name, was once more available through Mr. Throckmorton's exertions on his late friend's behalf, the trio took up their residence there in the course of the summer. Previously to this, however, Lady Felsparley, who was now tolerably well off herself, had in conjunction with her niece rented a little house in Half Moon Street during the season for the purpose of renewing her intercourse with her relations and such of her friends in London as she thought it advisable to cultivate. She was there enabled to resume, with her usual steadfastness of purpose, the to her interesting occupation,—and as she considered duty,—of seeking for eligible husbands for the two young ladies under her guardianship; and in the case of one of them her efforts were crowned with gratifying success.

At her mother's command Miss Felsparley,—though it cost her many tears and the young fellow a great deal of grief,—had broken with Reginald's friend Danvers, when his uncle, Sir John Danvers, had unexpectedly married in his old age a girl of seventeen. The old

gentleman, however, having been carried off by a sudden attack of bronchitis without leaving an heir, his nephew succeeded after all to the baronetcy, and, as he had still remained constant, renewed his suit to Evelyn Felsparley immediately on his return to England. On this her mother, having regard to his improved prospects, was now graciously disposed to smile. 'I could not bear my poor darling's woeful looks any longer, Sir Leopold,' said she. 'I had thought that dear Evelyn might perhaps have chosen a connection of ours who has long shewn a great attachment to her ; I think you know that I allude to Augustus Dollop, Lord Dumplingford's son. (Her ladyship had indeed been bitterly disappointed when that young man, who was connected with herself through the Duke of Granitshire, had married Miss Vivien Ruck the American heiress.) I had, I say, thought that it might have been, but I feel from what she has said to me that it would be wrong to stand any longer in the way of my dearest child's happiness.' So, as regarded her daughter Lady Felsparley felt triumphantly content, but in the case of Miss Beechcroft she was again doomed to meet with disappointment.

Captain Cope, who had come home to England on 'urgent private affairs' shortly after General Beechcroft's death deprived him of his appointment, had once more proposed to Sybil ; but the latter, though she owned to liking him very much, and treated him very kindly, had refused him more decidedly than ever. It was in vain that Lady Felsparley told her niece that she was 'foolish, *heartless*, yes wicked ! etc. to throw over a man with such prospects. Miss Beechcroft replied very haughtily that she was her own mistress, and would not be dictated to in such matters, and to her aunt's great annoyance Capt.

Cope, whom she earnestly pressed to try his chance again, frankly owned that he had resolved to persist no longer in his courtship, and shortly after rejoined his regiment in the Crimea, where, though the Alma had been won, the nation was beginning to learn that there remained still plenty of work to do.

It was after the little quarrel thus occasioned that Miss Beechcroft first consulted Mr. Throckmorton with regard to her troubles. He was rather shocked one morning when she arrived in a cab at the door of his chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and, on being shown into the sanctum where he transacted his conveyancing business, began to tell him how utterly unhappy she was; how her aunt Lady Felsparley was a tyrant; how she longed to retire into a 'home,' a convent, anywhere out of the world;—and a great deal more to the same purpose, 'the whole concluding,' as the playbills say, with a passionate burst of tears. It was an embarrassing situation for an elderly lawyer who had seen as little as he could possibly manage of ladies during a long period of his life, and the words of consolation and wisdom did not come so readily as might have been expected from a man who had so much to do with literature. He was, however, able to comfort her somewhat, and, accompanying her back to Half Moon Street, managed to effect a reconciliation between Sybil and her aunt. During the remainder of their stay in London the latter was much more gentle with her niece, and, being pretty well occupied with preparations for her own daughter's marriage, allowed Miss Beechcroft to have her own way pretty well.

'Her own way' at this time took the direction of trying to relieve suffering and want among the poor. She was constantly pouring into the ears of her guardian her

desire to make herself useful to others, and allowed him no rest till he had introduced her to some friends of his own who, having devoted their lives to such good works, were able to help her to occupy herself in the way she desired. Among these was Miss Nightingale, who at that time, in addition to her other good works, had voluntarily assumed the management of an asylum in London for sick governesses. There Sybil found plenty of congenial work, and evinced such zeal and aptitude for nursing as won the good will of the lady under whose direction she laboured. It was the foundation of a life long intimacy, which led Sybil to take part in many undertakings of a like nature, and when the time came for going down to Thornbury Grange, she left London only after urgent entreaties from her friends, and with unfeigned reluctance.

It was considered a matter of course that Mr. Throckmorton should pay the Thornbury party a visit, and thus it came about that during a great part of October he was residing within some six miles of Otterstone Hall. His stay at the 'Grange' was not, however, an unmixed pleasure to him, and, indeed, considering his tastes, may safely be said to have been for the most part endured as a duty. Lady Felsparley was an *exigeante* hostess, and over anxious to try and find amusement for her guests, instead of allowing them to amuse themselves; while Sybil was, it must be owned, rather thoughtless in her demands upon her old 'Uncle Edward's' time and good nature. The gentlemen who came to stay in the house were, for the most part, friends of Sir Leopold Danvers, all of whose tastes centred chiefly in 'sport,' and with whom Mr. Throckmorton had but little in common. In addition to these drawbacks to his comfort was one which, trifling and absurd

as it may seem, disturbed him more than any of the others. That inveterate old match-maker, Lady Felsparley, had taken it into her head that, his means being considerable, and his family an old one,—as has been already mentioned he was heir to his cousin Sir Carnaby Rudstone's large Yorkshire property,—he might prove an eligible *parti* for Sybil. His interest in all her plans, his affectionate manner towards her,—it was so *romantic* his having known her since she was a baby,—his frequent visits to Half Moon Street, and his zeal in discharging his duties as executor and best friend of General Beechcroft, all gave some sort of colour perhaps to her idea that he had really formed an attachment for Sybil which ought to be encouraged ; but the writer, who on this point can certainly speak with more authority than anyone else, is able to declare most decidedly that none of those tender thoughts which Lady Felsparley attributed to him ever entered Mr. Throckmorton's brain. His affection for the daughter of his old friend, great as it was, as well for his sake as her own, had not one spark of romance in it, but was purely paternal. All romance,—and he had but little in his composition,—had indeed been buried for him long before Sybil was born, and as he was not slow to perceive his hostess' little plans which, though they served rather to amuse the other guests, soon began to annoy him, he was much relieved when circumstances occurred which freed Miss Beechcroft and himself from the false and ridiculous position in which Lady Felsparley chose to place them to each other.

It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that the thought and sympathy of the whole British nation were at this time centred in the gallant army in the Crimea.

By the establishment of 'The Patriotic Fund,'—which, started on the 13th October, amounted to £30,000 by the end of the month, and £300,000 by the end of the year,—and numberless other like organisations for the benefit of our soldiers and sailors, and for supplying chaplains, nurses, etc., the country testified its eager desire to make up for the faults of a deficient Administration, which every day made more apparent. It poured forth the wrath aroused by these against the Government, while it filled the papers with countless suggestions,—many of them, it must be owned, very absurd,—for our army, and inundated the War Office with extraordinary plans for the taking of Sebastopol by means of balloons, subterranean passages, and heaven knows what besides. Although the brief interval that separates us from that period has been so eventful that both the Crimean War, and the terrible scenes in India which followed it, are well nigh forgotten, all who can recall it will bear witness that it was a stirring time, when the nation showed with what a generous and gallant spirit it could rally in disaster, and speak with one voice :—

' A people's voice ! we are a people yet.
Tho' all men else their nobler dreams forget,
Confused by brainless mobs and lawless Powers.'

God grant that in all times of Britain's troubles those lines of the Laureate, written but a short time before that terrible war, may still prove to be true !

Everyone will remember how, when the shortcomings of our hospitals in the East were brought to light the numerous schemes suggested by medical men and others for remedying them eventually led to the proposal, made by the Rev. Mr. Shepherd, of St. John's House,—a

Protestant Sisterhood in Westminster,—to the Bishop of London, that ladies devoted to acts of charity should voluntarily go out as hospital nurses to the Crimea. When the plan developed, and, receiving the countenance of the Duke of Newcastle, as minister of war, ended in the establishment of a body of lady hospital nurses under the management of Miss Nightingale, Sybil Beechcroft, who had followed all the correspondence on the subject with the greatest interest, at once made up her mind that she would be one of the thirty-eight ladies who were to go out to Scutari. Of course she consulted Mr. Throckmorton, and of course he at first endeavoured to dissuade her from thus leaving her home and friends. Though her strong will and high spirit led her to treat his remonstrances with much less attention than they deserved, they had sufficient weight with her to make her falter for a while in her resolve, and might perhaps in time have led her to alter it, had it not been for a certain drive which she took with her aunt to pay a visit to some neighbours. The road,—though it is difficult to realise it now,—traversed a portion of what was once a great battle-field from which Cromwell's Ironsides pursued the routed troops of King Charles for some sixteen miles, 'even unto Leicester where the King lay,' and it happened oddly enough that Sybil and Lady Felsparley, who having known the fact the whole of their lives were scarcely conscious that they were passing over the scene of the great parliamentary victory, managed to fight a battle together as they reclined among the cushions while the carriage drove homewards.

'Did you hear what Miss Smithfieldson said about Miss Nightingale, aunt Gertrude!' said Sybil as they left the lodge gates of Karflam Park, where they had been

calling. 'Did you hear her say that she had visited all the principal reformatories and hospitals in London and Edinburgh, as well as on the continent?'

'Yes, dear. Quite charming of her! Miss Smithfieldson is very nice I think,—considering what they were (Mr. Smithfieldson, of Brandybere & Smithfieldson, contractors, was one of the few *nouveaux riches* in Clayshire). Yes! Very nice really! Though the father is certainly vulgar, the son seems fairly well-bred and will be immensely rich. What a pretty place it is.'

'I call it a glorious life!' continued her niece, ignoring the Smithfieldson family. 'A noble life! Just think, Aunt Gertrude, of the good she does! That Home for Sick Governesses in London where I used to go owes everything to her.'

'Delightful!' says Lady Felsparley, who would not have entered a hospital on any account if she could help it. 'Quite a perfect character indeed!' and she stifled a little yawn. 'But you know her of course, don't you? Did not your uncle,—I mean Mr. Throckmorton,—by the way I wish you would not call him uncle, Sybil, as he's no relation; it's very silly, and I find myself doing the same. Did not Mr. Throckmorton introduce you to her?'

'Yes, it was very good of him.'

'How good he is! How truly excellent! I hardly know anyone so really unselfish as he is my dear!' went on the elder lady.

'Indeed he is,' replied Miss Beechcroft with enthusiasm, though somewhat surprised at this warm expression of admiration on her aunt's part. 'Dear old Uncle Edward!'

'Please don't say uncle child. It annoys me. Look

how pretty the red-brown of that beech looks against the yellow and green of that old elm ! Is it an elm ? No ! its an oak. Quite charming is it not ? Do you know my dear Sybil,' and she lowered her voice, so that Thomas the coachman, and Joseph the footman should not overhear her. 'Do you know I have often thought dear, and especially of late since he has been here, that Mr. Throckmorton has a great *tendresse* for some one ?'

'How can you be so stupid, Aunt Gertrude !' cries her niece, who of course at once divines who 'some one' is. 'It is too absurd !'

'Not at all Sybil. Age has nothing to do with it ; and I don't call Mr. Throckmorton old ! Some hearts are always fresh. I remember Lord Lameck paid me great attention when I was a girl, and people said he was quite *épris*. Such a charming old gentleman ! And then there was Mr. Cutlerham the great Birmingham man who was worth half a million of money, he was long past sixty when he married Lady Osmunda Rowancourt, the youngest of Lord Ashleigh's daughters, and she was only seventeen.'

'Such things are horrible !' cried Sybil with a flushed face.

'Horrible ? Nonsense child ! The Rowancourts were in difficulties then I remember. Since that they have come in for a good slice of the Ivitree money through old Lady Rowancourt, the daughter of Ivitree, the solicitor who managed the Rowancourt property, and that *mèsalliance* saved them from ruin. I remember Cynthia Rowancourt, the second girl, very well. She was a great friend of mine as a girl. There were seven, and all their names ended in "a." Aurora, Cynthia, Sophia, Leonora, Osmunda, who is now Lady Cutlerham, and

Adela, who ran away with Captain Chessington, and lives near this at Otterstone. Osmunda was a very good, charming girl, and all the world thought it a splendid match.'

Sybil vouchsafed no reply to these remarks but a scornful toss of the head, to which Lady Felsparley paid no attention.

'Mr. Throckmorton,' went on the latter, 'is, I repeat, a most excellent man. He can't have less than £1500 a year, and if he survives his cousin, Sir Carnaby Rudston, he'll get the greater part of the Carnaby property. He can't be more than fifty-eight, in fact I know he is not, for I have known him since he was quite a boy,—and he is evidently very fond of you, Sybil. He has watched you from babyhood, dear.'

'Aunt Gertrude! I request you to say no more on this subject!' says her niece in a great rage.

'Sybil! What do you mean! Please not to speak so loud or the servants will hear! I shall tell you my opinion when I think fit, and it is your duty to listen, and to be guided by my advice.'

'I forbid you to mention the subject to me,' repeats Sybil, trembling with anger.'

'Forbid! to me! You wicked undutiful girl!' Never before had Sybil ventured to use such language to her aunt, and Lady Felsparley was a good deal taken aback by it.

'Yes! I will hear no more of it! You are always trying to get rid of me! Always dictating to me, and worrying me to marry some one! And now you must go and make mischief between me and dear Uncle Edward! It is too bad! too bad!

'Sybil! I command you to be silent! He is not

your uncle, you little fool, as you very well know. It is you who are always opposing my plans for your welfare. I am your natural guardian, and you are always rebellious and obstinate. Ever since that young Roman Catholic, Mr. Oakburne,—from whose dangerous advances I saved you,—turned your head, you have been unmanageable and disobedient, you wicked girl !’

‘You parted me from the only one I ever cared for,’ said Sybil ; ‘and now you make my life wretched through your vile schemes. I will stand it no more. You have married poor Evelyn as you wish, and that ought to content you. I will hear no more from you on this subject, I tell you. It is very cruel of you to bring up poor Reginald, and say such wicked falsehoods of him. Yes ! cruel and wicked !’ and the young lady burst into tears.

If tears were a sign of defeat she was routed, but if to assert one’s own views and receive no answer be victory, she may be said to have won the day. Perhaps it was through pity, or desire to avoid a scene, or again because, maybe, she had no answer ready, but whatever the reason, Lady Felsparley made no reply to her niece’s passionate speech, and the rest of the drive was accomplished in silence. Each lady at once sought her room, and during dinner that evening Sir Leopold Danvers, Evelyn Felsparley, and Mr. Throckmorton, did all the talking.

It is impossible to say how much of this quarrel Thomas the coachman, and Joseph the footman, heard in their exalted posts of vantage on the box. Servants, it is well known, do somehow manage to know everything sooner or later ; and it is to be feared that, as they took the carriage back to the stables, Joseph, according

to his custom, made some humorous remarks to his fellow on the subject, and that, with that keen sense of amusement which the troubles of their masters ever excite in the domestic mind, the party in the servants' hall at Thornbury Grange discussed that evening the question as to whether the 'young missus' or the 'old un' had got the best of the battle.

CHAPTER VII.


*Shows how Mr. Throckmorton had an adventure, and
how Sybil went to the wars.*

Here comes a man of comfort, whose advice
Hath often stilled my brawling discontent.—

SHAKESPEARE.

Two paths lead upward from below,
And angels wait above,
Who count each burning life drop's flow,
Each falling tear of Love.

• • • • • •
While Valour's haughty champions wait
Till all their scars are shown,
Love walks unchallenged through the gate
To sit beside the Throne !—O. W. HOLMES.

 HE fact that they were each, in a way, mistresses of Thornbury Grange, did not serve to increase the harmony between Lady Felsparley and her niece. Miss Beechcroft was, it is true, the owner of the little estate, and was known by all the household to be so, but, in deference to her relationship to her, as well as to her age, she yielded the position of ruler of the establishment to the elder lady who of course contributed her share of the expenses of the joint *ménage*. She had of late, and especially since her visit to Mr. Throckmorton in London, been striving as much as possible to be yielding and unselfish towards her aunt; but we all know that at times even the worm will turn,—precious little benefit does the poor wretch derive

from the contortion !—and there were certain points as to which Miss Beechcroft, who had nothing of the worm in her disposition, would turn on a very slight provocation. Lady Felsparley, who of course had learnt pretty well what these points were, and was, as has been said, a person of great natural shrewdness and tact, was able by skilfully using her knowledge to inflict tortures of a very refined kind upon Sybil, when she proved unmanageable. Her ladyship being quite unable to understand religion herself was in the habit of setting down other people's efforts in that direction as cant and hypocrisy, and regarded her niece's visits to the poor, and attendance at hospitals, as merely an artful means for rebelling against her lawful authority. She professed to be in constant dread lest Sybil should engage herself to some curate or benevolent doctor, purely to spite her for having made so many efforts to marry her to an eligible husband, and indulged in a good many sneers at the kind of labours to which she now devoted herself. The reader will therefore easily understand that the above mentioned altercation respecting Reginald Oakburne,—a subject which Lady Felsparley, with her knowledge of what she was pleased to term Sybil's deceitful conduct to her father in the matter, found very useful as a means of humiliating her niece,—was merely one of a series of similar conflicts waged with the ever varying success of war. It was destined, however, to be more decisive in its results than any previous one, owing to the fact that Mr. Throckmorton was called upon by Miss Beechcroft to arbitrate between the fair combatants.

He was, as may be well believed, disagreeably surprised at the duty thus thrust upon him. Sybil had come upon him suddenly as he was smoking his after-breakfast cigar

on the lawn, and rudely broken in on one of the pleasantest moments of the day, by begging him to speak to her on a matter of vital importance, and then besought him once more with many tears to give her his assistance to try and join the party of ladies about to sail for the Crimea, under the guidance of Miss Nightingale. She recounted the quarrel of the previous day, and all the permanent causes of difference between herself and her aunt, and pleaded so strongly in support of her wish to devote herself to the noble work of a hospital nurse, that at last she persuaded him to go and talk to Lady Felsparley on the matter. Then began fresh troubles. Her ladyship of course was furious. The idea was monstrous! How could Mr. Throckmorton suggest such a thing! People would say that Sybil was out of her senses! that she, Lady Felsparley, had driven her out of the house! Heaven only knew what they would not say! Mr. Throckmorton was most kind,—she had indeed a secret contempt for his kindness, and had had ever since she had encouraged him and then jilted him as quite a young man years ago,—he was most kind, but he must not allow himself to be talked round by Sybil. Poor dear Sybil, she feared, was not quite straightforward. Yes!—she could not bear to say it of one of whom she was so deeply fond, but she must speak the truth,—she was, she feared, rather deceitful.

‘Excuse me, Lady Felsparley,’ cries Mr. Throckmorton with some warmth. ‘Excuse me! I think you are utterly wrong on that point. Sybil is one of the most truthful girls I know.’

‘Ah! my dear Mr. Throckmorton! men are so deceived in our sex! I fear we are most of us given to subterfuge!—all except a very few, who, like my poor

self, get into trouble for our plain speaking. No ! I fear I cannot change my opinion of poor Sybil ! The fact is, I am so much afraid that that stupid old love affair with Mr. Oakburne is at the bottom of all this.'

Mr. Throckmorton expressed surprise. Oakburne ! who was Mr. Oakburne ?

Mr. Oakburne ! did he not know ? She really thought she ought to tell him. And then Lady Felsparley told him the whole story,—her version, that is, of the story,—with, as may be supposed, but little tenderness for the faults either of Reginald Oakburne or her niece. The recital astonished and rather shocked Mr. Throckmorton, who had a very high opinion of Sybil. He could not, however, bring himself to accept all Lady Felsparley's statements, and concealing the displeasure and suspicion which they roused in him, begged her to think over the matter again.

After luncheon was over he again had a talk with Miss Beechcroft, setting before her more seriously and fully than he had yet done, the sterner side of the duties she thought of undertaking, but he only found her still more fixed in her resolve. Her cousin Evelyn, who was very fond of her, had come round to her side, and the two young women having taken counsel together, and having, of course, enlisted Sir Leopold Danvers in the cause, Miss Felsparley had agreed to attack her mother on Sybil's behalf. Then Mr. Throckmorton, with the reluctance with which he always approached such subjects, asked Sybil to explain to him what had *really* happened with regard to this Mr. Oakburne. He felt it his duty to do so, for he was helping her to undertake an arduous mission against the wishes of her nearest female relation, who darkly hinted at some previous love affair as the prime motive

for her conduct. He wanted therefore to set his mind thoroughly at rest in the matter, and as he fully believed Sybil, and from old experience had but little faith in her aunt, determined to try and ascertain the truth of the charge against her from her own lips. The truth, and the whole truth, did Miss Beechcroft tell him. Bitter as was her feeling of humiliation at having to justify herself against her aunt's statements, it was a satisfaction and relief to her to tell her version of the tale to one for whom she had so much respect and affection. She therefore told him everything, owning how wrong they had been in concealing their engagement, but blaming herself, nevertheless, for not having kept it after she had once entered into it. She admitted that she still retained the same feelings towards Oakburne, but declared that there had now long been an end of all such thoughts between them. He was, she said, still with his regiment in India, as far as she knew, and she had been told that he now cared for some one else. She implored Mr. Throckmorton with great fervour therefore not to believe that she could be so base as to be influenced by any such motive as her aunt ascribed to her, and assured him most earnestly that she had given her whole heart to the good work which Miss Nightingale was about to undertake. If she was not to be allowed to assist in it, she said, she should be utterly miserable; while to live with her aunt any longer would either drive her out of her mind, or make her very ill indeed.

'Well, well, my dear! I quite believe you,' said Mr. Throckmorton at last, regarding very kindly the flushed face and tearful eyes.

'You don't know Lady Felsparley!' cried Sybil. 'You don't know how she persecutes me. She is

always pestering me to marry some rich men. I believe she wants you to marry me—that is—I mean that she wants me to marry you. You know what I mean, Uncle Edward,’ says the young lady, blushing crimson.

‘God bless my soul!’ cried that gentleman, with an expression of alarm so comical that Miss Beechcroft burst out laughing at it, and at her slip of the tongue.

‘Upon my word that’s too bad!’ ejaculated Mr. Throckmorton warmly; and then he heartily joined her, telling her playfully that she was ‘an impudent young women.’

‘Well, well,’ said he after a pause, ‘I own I think you aunt is a terrible old matchmaker, Sybil. We have been acquainted since we were boy and girl together, and so I know her pretty well. I will speak to her once more; and you had better write to Miss Nightingale at once. Of course you are no longer a minor, and can do what you please in the matter; and then I will go and see her myself to-morrow.’

‘O thank you! Thank you a thousand times, Uncle Edward! But I have,—that is—I did write to her before.’

‘What! Before this business, this scene took place?’

‘Yes. I wrote directly I saw the scheme mentioned in the papers,’ replied Sybil, in some confusion.

‘Oh ho! That shows you are in earnest, at all events, my dear. But you might have told me. I suppose, however, ladies never *can* tell one *everything*!’ and, while Miss Beechcroft was warmly repudiating the idea, he left her with a laugh, and went again to interview Lady Felsparley.

This time his ambassage was more successful. He pointed out how Sybil was now nearly three-and-twenty,

and fully entitled to control her own actions. He said that she had shewn him that she felt so thoroughly resolved on her project, that in his opinion it would be very wrong to attempt to thwart her, while the experience she would gain would no doubt soften, and do her a great deal of good. Finally, he added that her niece had said that she thought Lady Felsparley made a much better mistress of the Grange than she could ever do, and had hoped she would have consented to continue there and put things thoroughly in order, so that on her return she might find that they were once more really settled in Clayshire.

This last argument decided the matter. One of her ladyship's chief objections had been her belief that she and her daughter would be bound in honour to leave Thornbury Grange if Sybil expatriated herself, and the good lady felt a decided repugnance to doing so. She, however, by no means objected to being its sole mistress for a time. Evelyn might be married from there, which would have a much better effect than if she had been obliged to give the breakfast in the poky little house in Half Moon Street. So, after the proper amount of reluctance at such an idea, and of fear at the dangers dearest Sybil might incur, the aunt consented to be reconciled to her niece, and they kissed each other most tenderly, and became to all appearance as affectionate a pair of relatives as could be found in Her Majesty's dominions. Sybil's spirits rose from zero to boiling point, and she never ceased praising and petting her good friend Mr. Throckmorton, who, true to his promise, set off early next morning to have a personal interview with Miss Nightingale on her behalf.

Mr. Throckmorton was fortunate enough to find Miss

Nightingale at home when he called. On learning the object of his visit she told him that she had that morning received a letter from Miss Beechcroft, of whom she spoke in very kind terms, and whom, after some consideration, she consented to accept as one of her staff of hospital nurses. Mr. Throckmorton, much pleased with the success of his mission, and feeling that time was of the greatest importance, then took his leave in order to return as soon as possible to communicate his good news and make arrangements for Sybil's departure.

It was already evening when he hurried to the station, and took his ticket. A train was standing by the platform just ready to start, and he enquired of the porter if it was for Thornbury.

'Thornbury! Come along sir! no time to spare!' cried the other, and Mr. Throckmorton had just time to get into a first-class carriage as the train began to move out of the station. It was an express, and his mind was so fully occupied with Sybil and her intended journey, that it did not occur to him to trouble himself about his own, till the train stopped at the first station, some thirty miles out of London.

'This train stops at Thornbury, does it not?' said he to one of his two fellow-passengers, more by way of conversation than anything else.

'Upon my word, I don't think it does,' answered the younger of the two.

'No, I really don't think it does,' added the other, a man of his own age. 'I was rather surprised to hear that porter tell you so. But I don't feel sure.'

Mr. Throckmorton in some alarm put his head out of the window and made the enquiry.

'Stop at Thornbury?'

‘No, sir! This train don’t stop there. They told you wrong, sir. It stops at Grendon. That’s your nearest station; it’s only three miles from Thornbury.’

With that they began to move off again, and he was obliged to resign himself to his fate with a laugh in which his fellow-travellers,—it is odd how comical such mistakes of one’s fellow-travellers always appear to us,—of course joined.

‘It is only three miles,’ said he, ‘and the weather is fine, so I shan’t suffer as much as I deserve for my carelessness,’ and the three fell to discussing the virtues and shortcomings of the railway company on whose line they were travelling, the war, and various other subjects till they reached Grendon.

It must have been a little past eleven when Mr. Throckmorton left the station, which is half a mile distant from the little village, and set out to walk homewards. The night was beautifully fine, the moon was at the full, and there was a keen almost frosty feeling in the air. All promised a pleasant walk, and he set off briskly, after having received careful directions as to the route, which he thought he was pretty sure of, from the people at the station. He trudged on till he came to a point where the road branched into two others, when he took the turn which he was told to take, to the right, imagining himself to be making for his destination. It so happened, however, that the porter, as so often occurs in such cases, had meant the turn to *his* right, and that Mr. Throckmorton had understood this as *his own right*, which was of course the porter’s left. Hence it came about that after walking some two and a half miles, and finding that the lights of Thornbury did not appear in the distance, he stopped in some

perplexity. No one was near whom he could ask. What was he to do? He went on slowly a little further, and presently heard a measured step in front of him. He joyfully quickened his pace, and found that the pedestrian was a policeman. The fact that it seemed a very lonely part of the road, was sufficient to account to his experienced mind for the presence of the guardian of the peace who, in rural districts, seems usually to be met with in such spots, and far away from the hamlets entrusted to his charge.

‘How far to Thornbury, my good man?’

The policeman stared a moment at the questioner’s high black hat, and black frock coat, and then burst into a loud guffaw. ‘Thornbury! you *are* going out of your way for Thornbury, sir! This ’d take you to Draxton! Leastways part of Draxton, for Draxton mostly lies away from the turnpike, and there aint no road to it like. Let’s see,—this ’d take you to Cressborough and then to Downingham.’

‘That is very provoking!’ cried Mr. Throckmorton. ‘I have walked from Grendon station.’

‘Ah! you mistook the turning to be sure! Ought to have kept to your left.’

‘What had I better do?’

‘Well, I was thinking,’ replied the policeman, rubbing his nose violently. ‘Let’s see, now. If you come with me a little way I’ll put you into a lane that’ll take you, after about half a mile, straight into the high road through Otterstone.’

‘Otterstone! Oh yes! I have heard of that place.’

‘Ah! that’s my village!’ He was, in fact, Robbins the Otterstone policeman, but the hamlet of Draxton was also in his beat. ‘Well, then. You go down the

lane and turn to your right, and then you're in the turnpike to Thornbury. It's about five mile and a bit, and as straight as you can go.'

'Thank you, my good man,' said Mr. Throckmorton, slipping a coin into his hand.

'Stay a minute,' answered the other, his faculties perhaps brightened by the tip. 'If you like to go by the fields it'll save you a good mile and more, sir.'

'How can I do that?'

'Well, after you get into Otterstone you'll pass a cottage or two, and then you go by a wooden fence, and you'll find a gate on your right. On your *right*, mind, sir. There's another gate there, but that's the park way. You'll easily see.'

'Two rights. I shall remember,' said Mr. Throckmorton.

'Two rights, that's it, sir. You'll find it a straight enough path, and save you a mile and more, it will. Good night, sir! and I hope you'll find the way, sir!' and Mr. Throckmorton, having heartily responded, plunged boldly down the lane indicated, remarking to himself how much more civil people are in the country than they are in the town.

When one comes to be a certain age walking ceases to be that pleasure which it is to some people in their youth; and even in youth walking has not much fascination for the most ardent pedestrian after a certain time of day. When Mr. Throckmorton,—who at no period of his life had at all cared for pedestrianism,—found himself safely out of the lane, it seemed to him to have been a very long half mile indeed, and a strong desire to meet some sort of conveyance, no matter what, going to Thornbury, filled his mind, as he passed by the 'cottage or two' which indicated Otterstone village. All, however, was

silent as the grave, and he said to himself that if people were more civil in the country than in London, the inhabitants of the metropolis were at all events not so absurdly early in their habits as they were here. Oh for a hansom! a four-wheeler! or even an omnibus! and then he remembered that it must be past the time even for the last London 'bus.' Not a vehicle or a human being, however, did he meet; and as he plodded along by the wooden fence it occurred to him that 'five miles and a bit' was a terribly long way, and that it would be a great thing to 'save a good mile and more' by going across the fields.

Ah! This must be the gate on the right! There was one opposite to it, but that seemed to open on an undefined sort of tract, and the policeman had certainly said the right. He opened the wicket and found a well-trodden path. This was it no doubt. What a pretty field! So much timber! It was almost parklike scenery! He walked quickly some two hundred yards or so down a gradual descent, thinking how much pleasanter this was than the road, and wondering how such fine trees came to be left in fields, and how it was that the fields were so large. But of course in Clayshire the meadows always were large, and had often fine timber in them! Holloa! What was that? A river! A river undoubtedly, though a small one, and what was more, a river without a bridge! He had reached a sort of glade of beech trees by the side of a stream, and at the end of it was a great moss-covered boulder that looked as if it must have originally come from some more rugged country than Clayshire. There must be some mistake! and he paused and looked about him. My goodness! there was a great big house! and there was a light, too,

in that round tower at the end of the building ! He had again taken the wrong turn and got into the park the policeman mentioned instead of into the fields. Otterstone Park, of course ! and that must be Otterstone Hall ! What an intolerable nuisance ! In his fatigue and disgust he felt almost inclined to go to the house and ask for a night's lodging. Wilfrid Oakburne must be still there. But of course that was ridiculous ! He took off his hat, and going to the big boulder leaned for a moment upon it to rest. Of all absurd adventures this was the most absurd ! Never again would he set out for a walk in an unknown country at eleven o'clock at night ! But he must get back to the road. Good heavens ! if people saw him they might think he was a poacher ! or a burglar ! An elderly barrister arrested on a charge of poaching, or for entering Otterstone park with intent to commit a burglary ! In spite of his weariness and discomfort he laughed aloud at the absurdity of the idea. Yes ! He must be off. There was a light in the tower, and he half thought he saw a figure come to the window. Yes, certainly ! it *was* a figure ! and the person, whoever he or she might be, was staring at him ! Good gracious ! He would return immediately to the road, and take good care to stick to it, though it *was* five miles !

He hurried back as quickly as he could to the highway, and walked steadily on till he reached Thornbury. It was past two in the morning when he arrived, and the 'Grange' was a good mile and over from the town, so he rang up the night porter at the 'Queen's Arms' Inn, and was uncommonly glad to tumble into the bed allotted to him.

It was eight o'clock, two hours later than his usual hour of rising, when Mr. Throckmorton awoke next

morning, and being anxious to get to Thornbury Grange as soon as possible, he ordered a trap to be got ready for him, and a cup of coffee to refresh his inner man.

‘They’ve had a terrible piece of work at Otterstone, sir; last night, sir,’ said the waiter who brought his breakfast.

‘At Otterstone?’ enquired he. ‘What has happened there?’

‘A burglary, sir, at the hall; Mr. Chessington’s place, sir. ‘Bout one o’clock it must have been they say. A forrin’ gent, Mr. Chessington’s secretary, was murdered, sir; but they didn’t take nothin’ it seems. One of the burglars was killed, and t’other they knocked down and took ‘im alive, sir. Goin’ to bring ‘im in this mornin’, and the inquest ‘ll be ‘eld at the “Golden Cow” over the dead man. Yes sir.’

‘Dear me! dear me! that’s a bad business!’ replied Mr. Throckmorton a good deal startled. ‘You don’t have the inquests here, then?’ added he.

‘Oh dear no, sir! Wouldn’t suit us at all! No respect’ble folks would stay with us, sir. It brings such a lot of low fellers about the ‘ouse, and there’s so much drinking, what with the witnesses and the jury and that. No! that’d never do! They always holds ‘em at the “Cow,” sir.’

‘Ah, yes! You are quite right! It must be a very disagreeable thing for Mr. Chessington’s family this! Very sad altogether!’ and Mr. Throckmorton, after a little more gossip on the subject, paid his reckoning and drove off to the “Grange.” Being a prudent man he did not think it fit to tell the waiter that he had accidentally strayed into Otterstone Park probably but a short time before the burglary, nor was he of course

aware that by doing so he had in all likelihood saved the life of his young friend, Wilfrid Oakburne, by leading him, as the reader knows, to go out and see who the strange figure standing by the great boulder could be, and thus to escape the commencement of the murderous attack upon Hoffbauer.

Miss Beechcroft was of course overjoyed by the news that her friend brought her from London, and great was the commiseration which his adventure excited among the ladies of the household, though Sir Leopold Danvers playfully hinted that it was an *after-dinner* walk. Sybil's preparations were soon made, and she took an affectionate farewell of her cousin and Lady Felsparley, the latter overwhelming her with tender regrets. She subsequently made great capital in conversation out of her dearest niece Sybil's heroic devotion, "and the great shock that her going has been to me;" and at her daughter's wedding next month bewailed to everyone the absence from the ceremony of one so dear to her.


Next day, amidst the crowds assembled to witness the departure of Miss Nightingale and her devoted followers, Mr. Throckmorton bade his ward an affectionate farewell. As is well known, men of all countries and creeds united in doing honour to the little band. The authorities at Boulogne, the railway officials throughout the route to Marseilles, the captain and crew of the 'Vectis' steamer which bore them to the East, all, of whatever rank or condition, with whom they had to do, delighted to give them every help in their power, and pay them their tribute of praise and respect. But sad and terrible was the contrast of the life they entered on when their journey ended. Then all romance vanished and they found themselves face to face with the sternest realities. No

more crowds of healthy, happy, folk to cheer them on their landing, but instead a confused assemblage, of which the wounded and the invalid orderlies waiting to bear them to the hospitals, formed the greater proportion ; the bodies of the dead ; stretchers, and arabas to which oxen were yoked, ready to carry away the helpless sick ; stores, munitions, and all the paraphernalia of war, the scourge of the earth. To spend day after day in hospitals, filled well nigh to the doors,—in the Barrack Hospital alone there were almost two and a half miles of sick beds,—to minister to men eyeless, footless, armless, shot, sabred, bayonnetted, emaciated with want, writhing under the agonies of cholera, of dysentery, and of fever ; to tend every form of suffering, and to suffer in spirit themselves from helplessness to aid it on account of the heart-breaking want of necessary appliances ;—such was the life of the hospital nurses at Scutari, and such were the duties that Sybil Beechcroft found herself called on to fulfil.

CHAPTER VIII.

"What will Uncle Giles say?"

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
Yet not for power, (power of herself
Would come uncall'd for) but to live by law,
Acting the law we live by without fear ;
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.—TENNYSON.

HE murder and burglary at Otterstone made, as may be supposed, a good deal of stir, not only in the neighbourhood, but throughout the country, and supplied the newspapers with some valuable material for their columns.

Both at the inquest and the trial Wilfrid Oakburne was of course the principal witness, and from what Hoffbauer had told him just before his death with regard to Frederica Ledru and the plans which her husband and Portal had formed respecting the unhappy pair, it was not hard for him to arrive at a true, and the public at a tolerably fair conclusion in the matter.

Reuben on his wife's flight had, it appeared, determined,—partly owing, no doubt, to the half-insane state of mind to which his drinking fits had reduced him,—to be revenged on Hoffbauer, and at the same time secure the papers which he and Portal coveted. Evidence showed that he had made careful enquiries at the lodgings in

Poulford Street respecting Hoffbauer's movements, and, after successfully tracking him to Otterstone, had, in company with a certain Louis Monluce,—an unscrupulous associate of Theodore's who bore him a grudge, and who had been concerned in a previous robbery in his own country,—gone to the village of Grendon, where they had taken lodgings for the purpose of reconnoitring the house and arranging their plans. Chance had thrown in their way Neddy Bolton, and it was through him that they had discovered the existence of the secret passage to the tower. It was shewn that this unfortunate wretch, who had been always allowed to wander about the park at his pleasure, had long since found out that this hidden way was not, as popularly supposed, filled up, and had penetrated by it to the room in the tower, which he had actually been in the habit of using as sleeping quarters till Hoffbauer's arrival. That event having deprived him of his resting-place had excited his anger against the German, and, being much more in possession of his faculties than was supposed, he had, by means of signs and exclamations, imparted his knowledge to Reuben and his confederate, who, with his help, had worked at making it available for their purpose for some nights previous to the burglary. This accounted for the noises which Hoffbauer attributed to rats, and of which he had spoken to Wilfrid only the day before his death. The latter and Fowler were of course able at once to identify both Reuben and his accomplice as the men they had met in the Thornbury road; and no doubt it was they too whose appearance had so unfavourably impressed Lady Adela and her sister, when they passed them out driving. With regard to the motive of the crime, all that transpired at the trial was that it was due in a great measure to

jealousy on Reuben's part, and that there were certain papers relating to Hoffbauer's history out of which his murderer had hoped to make money. Had it been desired to summon Frederica as a witness, Wilfrid Oakburne of course knew where to find her, but he was able to prove the fact that she had left her home, and her intimacy with the murdered man, without going to the painful necessity of calling on her to give evidence. The public, therefore, heard but little of her name in connection with the proceedings, and of course were kept entirely ignorant of the share that Portal had in suggesting the robbery of the papers from Hoffbauer. That worthy thus managed to escape scot free from the consequences of his guilt, though it may be imagined he felt considerable uneasiness till the trial was concluded, and Monluce had been sent across the seas, and Neddy Bolton to Broadmore. The circumstances of Wilfrid's going out into the park just before the burglars made their entry excited a good deal of curiosity, and he was subjected to rather a searching cross-examination on the subject, by the counsel for the prisoners. While most people concluded that the figure he had seen was one of the robbers, some lovers of the supernatural, having discovered the old legend of Sir Walter Throckmorton's ghost, started the theory that it was a veritable apparition, and Mr. Beverley Chipps made the incident the basis of a thrilling ghost story for one of the magazines. It was not till long afterwards that Wilfrid Oakburne, who was a good deal puzzled by it at the time, learnt quite accidentally from Mr. Throckmorton the real facts of the case.

The reader will thus perceive that full as was the account then given in all the newspapers of what was

popularly known as the 'Otterstone Hall Tragedy,' the world in general was kept in ignorance of two or three of the hidden causes and side issues of the crime, which have been imparted to him; and he must now be informed of a still more important consequence resulting from it.

Walter Chessington, when he received from Hoffbauer on his deathbed, the documents relating to the ancestry of the latter was, as has been said, at first inclined to believe that the poor fellow's mind must have been wandering when he claimed kinship with him, and owing to the amount of business which the unfortunate occurrence threw on his hands, he was so occupied for some weeks that he could find no time for reading them. When at last he got an opportunity of doing so all his guests had taken their departure, except Lady Cynthia, who at her sister's special request stayed on to help her to recover the shock which the robbery had caused her, and he was alone with his womankind once more, and was once more getting a little tired of their society. Once more the painful little differences, which the presence of their guests had for a time averted, began to arise between him and Beatrice.

'Upon my word, Beatrice, it is too provoking the way you chop and change with every wind that blows. I can do or say nothing right!' said Walter one day after a warm discussion with his wife and sister about some trifling point.

'You know that is not true Walter! You know very well that I am most decided in my opinions! On the contrary it's you who never listen to anything I advise! You treat me as if I was a child and had no sense! You have no consideration for me, and you care for nobody's

opinion but uncle Giles.' Catherine, dear, let us get your aunt Cynthia to drive with us to Thornbury this afternoon and return Lady Felsparley's call. Her daughter seems a nice little thing !' and Mrs. Chessington turns her back on her husband, who goes out with wrath in his heart, and leaves the ladies to their own devices.

'I can't stand this sort of thing much longer !' says he to himself. 'What a fool I was to marry ! Poor Beatrice ! her temper's so infernally sharp !—with me at least. She never cared for me that's the truth. But it's my fault for marrying as I did chiefly to please Ashleigh ! How that man has influenced my life !' and he goes off to the stable and sees no more of his family till dinner time. He was beginning to find that in Beatrice's eyes, as he had said, he could do nothing right. She had affected to believe, that he was jealous of Oakburne,—which he was not in the least, having, on the contrary, taken a great liking for him. In her heart of hearts Beatrice knew this well enough, but she preferred to assume otherwise. Perhaps she was angry that her husband was *not* jealous of the young doctor. Perhaps she was angry with herself for not loving Walter more. More probably still, there was, though she did not realise it, a combination of both these feelings in her heart ; but be this as it may, there was 'a something' just now which made her continually at variance with her husband, and manifested itself in all those manifold little ways of making a man's life disagreeable, of which a woman is so thoroughly mistress.

It was after some such little domestic quarrel as the above that Walter one morning, having shut himself into his study, bethought him of looking over the papers which Hoffbauer had entrusted to him, and finding out what the poor fellow could have meant by his extra-

ordinary statement that he was his relation. He had grown to have a great regard for this wild *protégé* of his, and when the latter was buried according to his wish in the little churchyard of Otterstone, Walter felt that he was paying a last tribute to one who had felt a real gratitude and affection towards him.

‘Well, it is something to think one has had it, though it is gone!’ said he to himself with a sigh, as he looked out on the dull leaden horizon and foggy November atmosphere, the bare dripping trees to which but a few brown leaves clung, and the rime-covered grass beneath them. The prospect was not calculated to cheer his gloomy humour, and the fire seemed all the more pleasant by contrast; so he lit his cigar, looked out the papers, and seated himself in his most comfortable arm-chair.

He began to read with a good-natured interest that statement by the elder Hoffbauer of which the reader has heard so much. As he read on his interest grew keener, and presently an observer, had one been present, would have seen him start as he came to the account of Estelle Chessington. Then the interest changed to eagerness, and the cigar was laid aside as he read on with ever-increasing excitement till he had finished the papers. Then he rose, laid them on the table with a violent exclamation, and going to the window threw it open, letting the damp November fog stream in. He wanted air to relieve his throbbing brain and the strange feeling at his heart. What he had read made him feel much as he had felt years ago when he got the news of his father’s death at Frankfurt, and all the old associations and thoughts which he carried with him when he

had gone abroad on that occasion now came back to him.

Great Heavens ! Here was that dread belief that he was enjoying what did not really belong to him, that he was keeping others out of their rights, which had haunted his early years like a ghost, and which he had thought had been buried in oblivion long ago, suddenly reviving without any warning ! Reviving ? Nay ! Was not belief now turned into certainty ? That poor fellow who rested in the churchyard hard by had really been his cousin, had actually been the lawful owner of the estate of Otterstone and the house he was staying in. And he had known it ! and had given him these papers, this marriage certificate of George Chessington and Estelle Lèon, and told him to destroy them ! His last act had been to make him a generous gift, of the value of which he, Walter, had not had the slightest notion, and for which he therefore had never been able even to say ‘thank you !’ Hoffbauer, the outlaw, who had lived such a wild troubled life, and had died in dependence and exile, Hoffbauer whom he had treated with a kindly condescension which he had felt rather meritorious, had actually had the power to oust him, his supposed patron, from his fancied riches and honours ! But he was dead now, gone beyond the reach of gratitude and remorse, and none need ever now know the truth. He had but to throw these papers into the fire, and the secret would be safe for ever. Better do it at once ; and he turned from the window with that intention, when suddenly a fresh thought checked him. It was true that Hoffbauer’s death disposed of his own claim, but how did the proof of the fact of his being the grandson of George Chessington

affect those other claimants, the Beechcrofts? of Sybil Beechcroft, his boyish love?

Chessington, as has been said, had, like many other young gentlemen of large means, gone through the form of reading for the bar, and his legal knowledge, slight as it was, was sufficient to suggest to him a possibility which might perhaps otherwise have escaped him. If George Chessington had left an heir, and that heir was actually still living when his brother,—Walter's own grandfather,—succeeded to the property, the latter's title must have been altogether without foundation. Sir Pelham had died intestate; his eldest son George, who ought then to have succeeded him, had died, leaving a daughter. It was she, therefore, and not his grandfather James, who should have inherited the estate. The latter, it was clear, had no power to will away his lands to Walter's father, Captain Horace Chessington, who, as a natural son, of course lost his title the moment that James Chessington's will was proved invalid. Yes. There was no doubt of it, the property would then legally devolve on Mrs. Beechcroft's descendants. General Beechcroft, Sybil's father, and, after him, Sybil was entitled. The Beechcroft faction, as his uncle called them, had been all along in the right, and he, Walter, was in possession of what did not belong to him. There seemed to be but one conclusion,—that he was bound in honour to renounce his supposed birthright, and all the good things he had inherited with it, and to go forth on the world a dependent on his wife's means and the bounty of his relations. Was he really *bound* to make such a sacrifice,—a sacrifice that would affect not only himself, but all those nearest and dearest to him? It was a moment of terrible perplexity;

and in the midst of it the servant knocked at his door to tell him that luncheon was ready.

He rose and locked up his papers half mechanically. He noticed that the ladies rather stared at him when he joined the party in the dining-room, and Lady Cynthia enquired whether anything had happened.

‘Oh no! nothing thanks, Aunt Cynthia!’ he replied, and took his place quietly at the head of the table.

‘You are bothering yourself about that speechifying at Lidfield next week, Walter!’ said his wife with unusual tenderness. ‘I know you are. Why do you bother dear?’

It was the first kind word that Mrs. Chessington had vouchsafed to him for some days, and quite startled poor Walter. He flushed as he answered that it ‘was all right,’ adding something incoherent about having caught a chill in the fog. How would *she* take the news? What help could he expect from such a proud passionate nature as Beatrice’s? All the time they sat at luncheon he kept asking himself, ‘Is this really true? Can it be proved?’ and then he remembered of a sudden the discovery of those letters of Estelle Chessington’s by his uncle Lord Ashleigh. They furnished another proof, another link in the chain; and they were in his uncle’s possession! What would he,—what would Uncle Giles say?

His heart sank within him. He finished his meal in silence, and at its conclusion, declining the suggestion of the ladies that he should accompany them on their drive, he went out into the park and resumed his gloomy cogitations alone.

‘What ought I to do?’ was the question ever revolving in his mind. ‘If these things are true am I bound to surrender everything? Ought I not to consult the inter-

ests of those who are dependant on me? No one is really injured at all by the present state of things. Of course Miss Beechcroft is well provided for, and if I do this everybody will think me not only a Quixotic fool, but cruel to my own flesh and blood. I know what old Ashleigh would say, and what nine men out of every ten would say: burn the papers and keep your own counsel,—at all events keep your own counsel. Heaven help me! what ought I to do.'

'You have chosen a damp place for meditation, Walter,' said a voice close to him as he stood absently gazing at the grey river noiselessly gliding amongst the reeds.

'Hullo, Mr. Bowersby! You startled me. Are *you* meditating too?—on your sermon eh? I might return the compliment.'

Mr. Bowersby laughed in his short hearty way. He was rather fond of coming into the park for a constitutional, and to think over his sermons. 'Yes,' he replied. So you might. I was meditating on my sermon, but I was doing it peripatetically and not standing still as you are. You are not looking well, Walter. Has anything happened?' He had known Chessington since he was a boy and had long ago gained the right to call him by his christian name, a right which the other would have felt very sorry if he ever renounced.

'No! No! Nothing at all! my liver's wrong I think. This infernal damp weather I suppose. This place is terribly damp in the autumn, isn't it! But they all tell me I am looking seedy. What are you going to tell us about, eh? Any more discourses against scientific arrogance?' added he rather flip-pantly, for Mr. Bowersby was rather opposed to the tone

of the modern scientific thinkers, and though liberal enough in some of his views was fond of maintaining that they were far more dogmatic, and, on their own showing, had infinitely less basis for their assumptions, than the dogmatic theologians whom they denounced. As Walter was a great admirer of the scientific school, the two had had several little arguments on the subject, and Chessington being in rather a combative frame of mind felt half inclined to raise a discussion.

But the vicar was not in a mood to humour him. 'No,' said he gravely, 'I am going to give you a very commonplace text on Sunday. It is "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them."'

'Short at all events, but rather a well known passage,' replied, Walter still disposed to be cantankerous.

'Yes! well known, but not much followed, I believe,' said the other drily. 'But I won't keep you, Walter, for I want to get a stretch before I settle down to my work. Good-bye!' and he strode across the park towards the gate that opened on the Thornbury road.

'I've a mind to follow his text,' said Chessington to himself as he watched his retreating figure. 'He's a good fellow! Odd he should have chosen that particular text at this time. Yes I will, so help me Heaven! First I will speak to Beatrice, and, if the result is as I fear it will be, I will act alone. If, as I hardly dare hope, she is of my mind, we will face the result together, please God!' He felt relieved by his decision, and determined that he would speak to his wife that very evening, and then he went in and wrote some letters.

When the evening came, however, his courage failed him. He had thought out his little speech quite clearly but he could not summon resolution to make it, and the

evening went by silently and rather gloomily, without his having said his say. He passed a miserable night, harassed by conflicting thoughts. Was he after all justified in re-opening a question which might so easily be left to slumber in oblivion? Would not everyone say he was a fool,—he who had a reputation for being rather clever, and intellectual? But ever as an answer came the vicar's text; and, do what he would, he felt it was the truth. All night through the battle was being waged in his heart, but when the dim light of the winter morning broke, his first resolution won the day, and after breakfast he told his wife that he wished to speak to her about an important matter.

‘Let us go into the study,’ said he. ‘We shall be freer from interruption there!’ and they entered his sanctum.

‘Well! what is this mystery? What is it you want to tell me!’ asked Beatrice as he carefully closed the door and she seated herself in his easy chair. There was just a little tinge of contempt in her tones, just enough to imply that she did not think Walter’s ‘mysteries’ could be of any great importance.

Her husband looked at her fixedly, rather sternly, for a moment.

‘You will find it concerns you more closely than you imagine, Beatrice.’

‘Well! I am quite at your service.’

He took two or three turns up and down the room before answering, and then went up to the fireplace and stood facing her.

‘What should you say!’ he began. ‘What should you say, Beatrice, If I told you that this property of Otterstone Hall no longer belonged to me?’

‘Good Heavens, Walter! what do you mean?’

‘I mean what I say. What would you say if I were to tell you that I am no longer master of Otterstone Hall?’

He looked so stern that for once his wife felt a little frightened of him.

‘I should say,’ replied she, turning rather pale, and with a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to laugh, ‘I should say that you were going out of your mind.’

‘I am quite serious, Beatrice. This is anything but a laughing matter, I can assure you. The “mystery” I had to tell you amounts in plain words to this : I am *not* master of Otterstone Hall ! I never had a right to it.’

‘Walter !’ ejaculated his wife, turning quite white. She really thought that his mind was unhinged.

‘I don’t wonder at your astonishment. It must sound to you rather like the statement of a man who has lost his senses. But it is true, nevertheless. This place does not belong to me. The fact has only just come to my knowledge, but it is a most solemn undoubted fact, for all that.’

She gazed at him blankly. ‘I really think you must be mad !’

‘Do I look mad, Beatrice ?’

‘What do you mean, in God’s name, Walter ! Explain this pretty fact, please. Do you mean to stand there and solemnly tell me that you have no right to Otterstone Hall ! That you were a beggar when you married me ?’

‘Yes, that is what I mean. I am sorry to have to say it. I *am*, strictly speaking, a beggar, though of course I did not know it when I had the honour of proposing for Miss Elkfield’s hand. Mean as is the opinion you seem to have been gradually forming of me Beatrice, I could not be quite capable of that ! You had better moderate your anger and listen to my explanation.’

‘I am quite ready to do so, Mr. Chessington, and I think the sooner you make it the better,’ and she sat watching him with pale face and compressed lips, angrily drumming her little feet on the carpet.

‘You know that my father was a natural son of James Chessington. That James Chessington only got this property when his brother George died, as was supposed, unmarried. Well, the whole thing was a mistake. George *was* married, and he left a daughter. That daughter married a German named Hoffbauer, and had a son, who was murdered the other day in the tower, in this house, and who was buried in Otterstone churchyard. That man, my late secretary, was the legal owner of this property of Otterstone!’

Beatrice gazed at him with unfeigned amazement, which slowly turned into an expression of incredulous scorn. ‘This is monstrous! preposterous! I cannot believe this, Walter! Either you must be out of your senses, or else you are playing a cruel, unmanly trick upon me to try me! Yes! cruel and unmanly! You have no right to say such things! You married me for my money! You did! you know you did! You never cared for me really! Never! I say it is cruel to say such wicked things to me seriously like that! Cruel!’ and she burst into a flood of angry tears. She had been secretly nourishing this little grievance in her heart, persuading herself, though poor Walter gave her no real excuse for doing so, that it was for the wealth she would inherit, and for her father’s influence in Lidfield, and not for herself, that he had sought her.

An expression of such great pain passed quickly over her husband’s face that she almost repented her words for a moment.

‘What you say is most untrue and most unkind, Beatrice,’ he said sadly, after a moment’s silence, during which his face recovered the expression of stern gravity, so unusual to it, which it had worn during this interview. ‘You know that it is not the case, and that I might make a similar retort with more truth.’

Her face flushed angrily.

‘But I do not want to quarrel or bandy words. I forgive you ; for your anger is natural, perhaps just. I asked you to listen to me now because,’—and his voice trembled a little,—‘mainly because I consider that if a wife really loves her husband she should be his chief counsellor. You forget apparently that what I am telling you cannot be exactly pleasant to me, for I must repeat most solemnly that all that I say is true,—the plain truth.’

Beatrice’s heart smote her a little, but she could not bring herself to forget her wrath in a moment. All her life she had been accustomed to have her own way, and she could not bear to admit that she had been in the wrong.

‘If I spoke hastily you provoked me,’ said she drying her eyes with an injured air. ‘If you loved me you could not say such things ! I repeat that your assertions seem to me preposterous !’

‘I admit it,’ replied Walter quietly, ‘and I am going to prove them. Please to read these,’ and he handed to her Hoffbauer’s papers.

She took them with a half incredulous, half petulant air, and began to read ; and Walter, watching her face steadily, noted how her expression changed from one of ill-tempered carelessness to a keen interest manifested by occasional exclamations of concern and surprise. He,

however, said nothing, but still remained standing by the fire before her.

‘It is very wonderful!’ cried she at last, when she had finished. ‘But is it all true? really true?’

‘I am afraid there is no doubt of it.’

‘But then if it is!’ she exclaimed, with a sudden look of triumph, as the thought struck her. ‘If it is? What then? He is dead. This poor Hoffbauer is dead, and there is nothing to be feared from him! That settles the matter!’

‘I am sorry to say it does not,’ replied her husband; and then he told her of the Beechcroft’s claim, of his own feelings on that point as a young man, and all the circumstances of his journey abroad.

She listened with unfeigned anxiety and interest. ‘If this is indeed the truth, we are ruined! ruined! But I won’t believe it! I won’t believe it till it has all been proved!’ and she started to her feet. ‘You are not called upon to prove it, Walter!’

‘Listen, Beatrice,’ said he, gravely. ‘Listen to me. All depends on that. It is that question which I asked you to help me to decide.’

A curious expression crossed his wife’s face as he said this, which he could not quite interpret, but which he was inclined to attribute to anger that he should hesitate as to his decision. After all it was only natural, he thought with a sigh, that if he felt reluctant to risk parting with his fortune for a moral scruple, she, on whom the onus of doing justice pressed so lightly, should feel still more loath to do so.

‘I said help me to decide,’ he continued, ‘but I should really say it is this I asked you to hear my decision

on, for, for myself, I confess that I have already resolved what I shall do.'

'Well!' cried Beatrice, coming close to him and looking eagerly into his face. 'What is your resolve?'

'I have thought very long and earnestly over the matter,' answered he. 'I have prayed to be helped to do what is right, and it has been a hard struggle with me! You must remember that Miss Beechcroft is not poor or starving; on the contrary, she has a little estate of her own. She has no claims on her as I have, no family to think of. She has never lived here, whereas I and my sister were born here, and, with my mother, have lived here all our lives. More than this. She has never dreamed that this place could ever be hers, and knows nothing of our neighbours, of the tenantry whom we have known all our days, and who have, I think, become attached to us,—at least to Catherine and to my mother. If I should surrender the property to her it would only add to her riches, but it would reduce me and mine to comparative poverty. No one knows of the existence of her claim but myself, and I have only to throw this marriage certificate,'—and he took it from the table as he spoke,—'I have only to throw this into the fire, as poor Hoffbauer asked me to do, and all things will remain as they are, and nobody will be in any way really injured.'

Once more he paused and watched Beatrice's face carefully. It bore witness to a strong conflict in her mind. A half suppressed scorn was its strongest outward characteristic, but beneath it he thought he could detect an almost tearful, half pleading eagerness.

'I am glad that you can condescend to consider your wife and family!' said she at last contemptuously, in a

hard and forced voice. 'I wonder, though, that you can hesitate so long in the matter !' Her breath came quickly, and her eyes grew brighter with excitement.

The expression of pain again passed over Walter's face. Then, evidently controlling an impulse of anger, he went on steadily.

'Yes. I have thought of them, and I have told you plainly all the reasons in favour of destroying this bit of parchment. Your little speech is but another proof, added to many I have seen, that you never loved me, Beatrice. Nay ! I know well you never did, and who had your first affection. I had hoped that perhaps you might grow to care for me a little as time went on, and to return my love. But I fear that can never be now. In marriages like ours we have perhaps no right to hope for such things. Let it be so, however. You cannot ; and I cannot blame you, but it makes my burden heavier to bear. Hear me ! I have made up my mind to sift this matter to the very bottom, to spare no time or money over it. And if, as I feel almost sure now, it should turn out that Sybil Beechcroft is the legal owner of Otterstone Hall, I shall inform her of the fact and surrender it to her, heavy though the trial will be to me. That is my decision.' And he placed the certificate in his pocket, and with folded arms prepared for an outbreak of violent anger.

Beatrice burst into a passion of tears.

'I am very very sorry, Beatrice, God knows !' said he piteously. 'I know it seems cruel, perhaps unjust to you ; but it is my duty. Forgive me if you can, Beatrice !'

To his surprise she put her arms round his neck.

'No Walter !' she cried. 'It is you who must forgive.

You said I did not love you. You are right, I did not at first,—but, darling, I love you now.’

‘Thank God! You think I am right then,’ cried Chessington.

‘Right! Walter, can you doubt it! You have taken a great load off my heart dear. I thought you really meant to burn that paper, and then I should have hated you. Yes, hated you. I daresay many men would have done it. I am sure many women would. But now’—and she gave him a kiss which must have gone far to console Mr. Chessington for the unpleasantness of the first part of his interview.

‘Thank God!’ said he again after a pause. ‘Otterstone is well lost if it has gained me your love, Beatrice! I think I should have gone mad if we had gone on much longer as we have been doing. I was beginning to think we should never be happy together dear, and that you had given away all your heart before you married me, Now it will be easy to do my duty if you face it with me Beatrice. But remember, very many people will say we are foolish, insane, Quixotic, Heaven knows what! And I fear my poor mother and sister will not be able to think so well of my conduct as you do. Remember they have lived here all their days, and what an affection they have,—as I have,—for the dear old place. And if they say I am cruel and foolish what will the world say?’

‘Who cares for the world, Walter!’ cries the lady enthusiastically. ‘Its opinion must be worth nothing if it does not see that you have done the only right thing. And as for your mother and Catherine, I am sure they can only agree with me. What are you thinking of Walter?’

‘I was thinking,’ replied her husband very tenderly,

‘Well,—I was thinking my dear how enthusiastically you hail the idea of poverty, and that reminded me of a certain story you once told me of a fellow who found a jewel he didn’t know the value of.’

‘Oh Walter!’ and again there was a pause in the conversation, which was still further interrupted by Lady Adela’s knocking at the door, and asking her daughter-in-law to come and speak to her.

‘My goodness!’ cried Beatrice, as a sudden thought struck her. ‘Walter! what *will* your Uncle Giles say?’

A cloud passed over Mr. Chessington’s face. Few men were less given to using oaths than he was, but on this occasion he did certainly swear.

‘Damn Uncle Giles!’ cried he, with great fervour; and it must be added with regret that his wife laughed heartily at the wicked expression.

CHAPTER IX.

With the army before Sebastopol.

Hark to the tramp, and the drum,
 And the mournful sound of the barbarous horn,
 And the flap of the banners, that flit as they're borne,
 And the neigh of the steed, and the multitude's hum,
 And the clash, and the shout, 'they come, they come!'
 —BYRON.

Something like home that is not home, like alone that is not alone, is to be wished, and only found in a friend, or in his house.

—SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE.

THE interview recorded in the last chapter between Mr. and Mrs. Chessington took place on the eve of Guy Fawkes day, and while the youth of the village of Otterstone were amusing themselves by making the usual arrangements for its celebration, the two hostile armies in the Crimea were, though they were unaware of of it, also preparing to commemorate the 5th of November, 1854, in a manner which has made it as memorable in European as in English History.

It has been incidentally mentioned that Reginald Oakburne escaped with but a slight wound from the battle of the Alma, after which he of course proceeded with his regiment on that celebrated march to Balaclava which has been characterised by some historians as so rash, and by others as so brilliant a feat of arms. In the

battle of Balaclava, the second division, of which his regiment formed a portion, was not called upon to take part, the chief share of the infantry fighting being done, as everyone knows, by the 93rd Highlanders of Sir Colin Campbell's brigade of the first division, but in the first or minor battle of Inkermann when 1500 men of the second division withstood the outset of 8000 Russian troops, Captain Oakburne,—for he had been promoted to that rank on account of the casualties at the Alma,—managed to win for himself well-merited distinction.

Though the second division was protected by the guns of the first and light divisions, and supported by the brigade of guards and several regiments of the fourth division, as well as by General Bosquet with his French division in the rear, it was on it, and especially on the pickets of his own and another regiment, that the first attack and the brunt of the fighting fell. The Russian cavalry, artillery, and infantry, with parties carrying intrenching tools, and preceded by crowds of skirmishers, swarmed up the slope, on the crest of which the camp of the second division was pitched. Had it not been for the gallant stand made by the pickets, the enemy would doubtless have intrenched themselves in a position from which they could have been only dislodged by a pitched battle. The little handful of men, however, kept the enemy in check with the greatest intrepidity until Sir De Lacy Evans brought his artillery into position and used it with such effect as to force them in half an hour to abandon the field. It was then that the British infantry were able to assail in their turn and drive the Russians over the ridges to the head of the bay, and it was at this stage of the conflict that Reginald Oakburne won his Victoria Cross.

In following up the enemy his own regiment and

another pursued them too far, and were indeed only recalled with difficulty. A young ensign of his company, with the impetuosity of his age, was in advance of his men when they were ordered to return, and some of the enemy turning poured a parting volley on their pursuers which wounded him in the chest and the leg, and stretched him helpless on the earth. Oakburne saw his peril and, amidst a shower of bullets, ran back and raised him from the ground. As he did so a shot struck his left hand, shattering two of the fingers, and causing him such pain as forced him to relinquish his burden for a moment. By dint of extraordinary exertion, he had managed to get his comrade on to his back and stagger away with him, when a sergeant and private of his regiment, happily perceiving his danger, ran back to his assistance, and the four succeeded in rejoining the main body in safety.

This affair, which took place the day after the battle of Balaklava, did not receive so much notice in the despatch of the Commander in Chief as it perhaps deserved, owing no doubt to the ease with which the Russians were repulsed, and it was only realized later that,—as has been recorded by a distinguished officer,—had the enemy succeeded in effecting their design they would have inflicted a more serious injury on us than if they had taken Balaklava. That question, however, must be left to military critics to decide, and it is sufficient for the purposes of this history to state that those who took part in the action were well pleased with the result of their labours, and that to Captain Oakburne it was particularly satisfactory, although it cost him the loss of two fingers. The battles of Balaklava, the two Inkermans and the Tchernaya,—all of which were of the enemy's provoking, and attempts

not only to break through the lines of investment which the allies were continually striving to bring closer to Sebastopol, but also to annihilate them by assaults on a position offering quite as many vulnerable points as his own,—were regarded by the troops as agreeable diversions from the routine business of the siege. Though we had partially surrounded the great fortress, the Russians had also contrived to encircle us in such a way as to make our position one of constant danger ; and while we had the ocean to rely on in case of retreat, they had the advantage of an open route over *terra firma* in their rear by which they could bring their supplies and reinforcements into the beleaguered city. The artillery duel continued unceasingly, sometimes with advantage to one side, sometimes to the other ; and picket duty, and work in the trenches, went on day after day with monotonous regularity, while those engaged in the service of death grew daily more callous to dangers and sufferings of all kinds. Artillery waggons, full of powder for the magazines, would be driven for a half a mile within full range of the enemy's batteries, a well aimed shot from which would have blown both horses and men into the air ; but neither officers nor drivers gave a thought to the peril. During a lull in the firing men in the trenches chatted and made merry under the muzzles of the Russian guns and mortars, as they would in their own tents. The wounded were carried to and fro to the hospital tents, or despatched in waggons and ambulances to Balaklava ; the dead were cast into the burial pits dug for them ; the sick fell out of their ranks, or failed to answer to the muster roll in the morning ; and men heeded it scarcely more than they did the daily arrival of ammunition and stores. Englishmen, Frenchmen, and

Turks, fraternised and caroused together, worked, suffered, fought, and died together, with the same reckless courage and nonchalance, and still the unceasing bombardment went on. No wonder that now and again men got weary, and longed for some great struggle to vary the terrible uniformity of their lives.

Among the few amusements available for our soldiers none was more welcome at this time than the simple one of a good dinner, if it happened to come in their way. The commissariat was still as yet regular, and, under the circumstances, plentiful and good, but to possess a really good cook and a well furnished table, were luxuries which but few officers enjoyed, and the man who had these good things was tolerably sure of not meeting with a refusal when he invited a comrade to dinner.

It happened that one of the press correspondents, with whom Oakburne was slightly acquainted, added to his many other claims to popularity the above virtue of always somehow placing a well cooked and substantial repast before the guests he invited to his very hospitable board. When, therefore, he was kind enough, on the 4th of November, to ask Captain Oakburne to dinner, the latter accepted with great alacrity. He had recovered, as much as he could ever hope to do, from his hurt of the week before, and had just come off picket duty at the time when his friend sent the invitation, and the prospect of cheery society and a good meal was doubly agreeable. He devoted himself during his spare time in the afternoon to answering a letter his brother had written him from Otterstone, asking the latter many questions as to the old house, and the Chessington family, and telling him that when laid up in the hospital tent he had at last met his friend, Dr. Norton, whom he pronounced

to be a very good fellow. When he had finished and despatched his epistle it was time for him to start, so he set out leisurely for his friend's tent.

There had been heavy showers during the day, but towards sunset the rain temporarily ceased. It was a still evening, and on the outskirts of the camp of the second division, which lay on the edge of the plateau occupied by the allies, he paused for a moment to contemplate the scene before him. Below the Tchernaya river lazily wound its way past a few meadows and farm buildings to the harbour of Sebastopol. Thick brushwood covered the steep descent to it and the crest of the ridge where he stood, while on the opposite side of the valley, where lay the village of Inkermann, massive and almost perpendicular rock walls showed the abrupt break made by the river bed in a bold chain of mountains between 1200 and 1500 feet high. The face of the steep limestone cliffs was pierced by hundreds of caves, cells and passages,—according to tradition the work of the Taureans,—which mark the site of that ancient Inkermann, then known as Eupatorion, which one of the generals of Mithridates is said to have fortified two thousand years before the building of Sebastopol. The massive outline of the mountains, the deep crimson backed by heavy black clouds of the evening sky, and the darkling valley below, presented in their silence and absence of all trace of life, a strange contrast to the busy scene he had just left, and, but for a small earthwork battery not far from where he stood, which had not yet received the guns destined for it, Oakburne might have almost forgotten for a moment that he was close to the camps of two mighty opposing armies. Had he known the history of the rock fortresses opposite, his fancy might have re-peopled them once more with the

soldiers of the great monarch who so long withstood the armies of mighty Rome, when the names of England and of Russia had no place among the nations, or have rebuilt the ancient city of which the little Tartar village below was the puny successor. But Reginald had neither the imagination nor knowledge which suggest such trains of thought, and his mind was still full of the subject of his letter, a subject which aroused his susceptibilities on the few tender points of his naturally rather hard nature. His thoughts wandered back to those at home, to Lidfield, and more especially to Otterstone, which in his heart of hearts he secretly venerated and coveted as the old home of his family,—for pride of race was, perhaps unknown to himself, his strongest foible,—Otterstone for which he felt an affection, though he would have been ashamed to own it, because it was associated with his first meeting with Sybil Beechcroft. Should he ever see her again,—or his mother, or Ethel, or Wilfrid? Ah! for one more look at them all! once more to hear the well known voices! For a moment a rush of feeling came over him, as it will do at times in the hardest and coldest, and then with an impatient exclamation he turned and walked on towards the hill where the tent of his friend the correspondent lay.

He found on his arrival that a captain of the Enniskillen dragoons, a lieutenant in the marines, and his brother's friend, Dr. Norton, had also been asked to dinner, and were awaiting the coming of himself and another guest. As he was apologising for keeping them waiting, a burly, bronzed, fair-haired man, entered and shook hands with his host. 'Major Cope! glad to see you,' said the latter. 'Let me introduce you to Captain Oakburne of the —th.'

‘Halloa! Cope!’ cried Oakburne delighted. ‘*You* here. I *am* glad.’

‘Upon my soul! Why it’s Oakburne! How are you old man! Glad to see you again!’ answered his friend. ‘I thought you were back at Kurryapore long ago, and often pitied you with the infernal climate and those natives!’

‘And I thought you were married and settled ages ago Cope,’ said the other with a slight flush. ‘Were you at the Alma with your regiment? Surely not? When did you get here? You’re part of the light division I know.’

‘No! I’m not married, and I wasn’t at the Alma, worse luck!’ says Cope. ‘I only rejoined after poor old Beechcroft’s death. You heard of his death of course?’

No, Reginald had not heard of his death. Was awfully sorry to hear it. And then the two fell to interchanging experiences till the arrival of dinner interrupted them.

The host had been true to his reputation as a first-rate dinner-giver. He had been on a foraging expedition to Balaclava that morning and secured a goose, tinned ham, preserved milk, fresh eggs, and other delicacies. His French cook had done wonders with these and with the commissariat beef, and under the influence of good cheer the conversation soon grew interesting to all and to himself instructive as well. None of the men cared to talk about the doings in their own camps in cold blood, but as all were anxious to hear of those in others, they naturally drew each other out.

The dragoon, whose regiment had taken part in the charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava, told how one of the men in his troop being unhorsed ran to a Russian

lancer, pulled him by main force out of his saddle, and after killing him, mounted it and galloped off again to the fight. Then, as a counter story, he related how another trooper, acting as a vidette in one of their pickets, had been one evening accosted by an officer asking his way to the front, who got into conversation with him, and drew from him all sorts of details as to the strength of the regiment in men and horses, and its place of encampment. 'And after he had got all he wanted out of the idiot,' continued the narrator, 'the fellow suddenly pulled out a pistol and told him he was a Russian officer, was going back immediately to the Cossack picket, and that if he gave the alarm till he'd got fifty yards away, he would return and shoot him. Would you believe it the oaf stood there with his loaded carbine in his hand and let him ride quietly away without attempting to fire! and a pretty night we had of it, galloping about, changing the pickets, and sending out patrols.'

'I'll tell you a plucky thing I heard of the other day,' broke in the officer of marines. 'When the Russians made that sortie on the 26th that you were in, Oakburne, one of the Lancaster guns that the naval brigade were working was in such danger that an order was sent to spike it and retreat. It was touch and go, for the Russian skirmishers were within 300 yards, peppering the gunners with Miniè bullets, but Hewett, mate of the "Beagle," who had charge of the gun,—I happen to know him personally,—Hewett said quietly, "Such an order does not come from Captain Lushington, and, I will not obey it till it does!" Lushington commands the Brigade you know. Well, then he pulled down the earthen parapet of the battery, got some soldiers to slew round the gun, and

gave it the Russians hot with grape. They didn't like it at all I can tell you, and when they were in retreat he did tremendous execution on those huge columns of theirs with sixty-eight pound shot. It's extraordinary how they stick to that formation! Here's Hewett's health!

The toast was drunk very heartily, for the exploit had attracted a good deal of attention; and then Cope and Oakburne were led to recount incidents with regard to the doings of their respective divisions. Even Norton, though a non-combatant, was able to contribute his share to the conversation by his account of some of the experiences of himself and his fellow surgeons. When very ill, he had obtained from his superior medical officer a signed recommendation that he should go for a time to Balaklava. This recommendation had to be countersigned by the quartermaster-general, then by the colonel of the regiment, then by the general of the division, and finally by the adjutant general.

'A pretty complex process wasn't it?' said he. 'It travelled for six days about the camp, I believe, and then somehow got lost altogether!'

'And what did you do?' asked the host.

'Do!' answered Norton. 'What could I do? I never saw the paper again; and so I did without it. Somehow I got over my illness, I am thankful to say, though I really couldn't explain how I managed it. It's wonderful how men do get over these things.'

'It is wonderful!' replied the other. 'And it is still more wonderful to me how much gross mismanagement can exist, not in the medical only, but in the transport and all the other official departments. The army is ruined by red tape.' He had already exposed a good

many such abuses in his letters, and did not cease to do so throughout the war.

‘I believe you!’ cries the Enniskillener. ‘Its a miracle to me how we keep our horses alive, by Jove!’ and they fell to criticising all the authorities with great impartiality.

‘Is it true, Oakburne!’ enquired the marine, ‘that Sir De Lacy Evans thinks the position of your camp requires strengthening? I have heard from some one who ought to know that he has said so more than once, but that the Chief always says it’s all right.’

‘I have heard something about it,’ answered Reginald. ‘I know the Général wouldn’t have guns put in that sandbag battery, because he said it would be only asking the enemy to take them. I say Cope, when did you get your majority?’

‘I got it after the Alma. When did you get your company?’

‘Why, after the Alma,’ answered his friend with a laugh, in which all joined.

‘I expect a goodish many of us got our steps there, or at Balaklava,’ said the dragoon. ‘Its good for getting one’s steps this kind of thing. Well! I must be off,’ he continued, rising. ‘Picket duty for me to-morrow. Four o’clock you know. Let us sleep while we can—eh?’

‘Give us long rest or death,
Dark death or dreamful ease,’

quoted the marine, who was an admirer of the laureate. ‘There’s more chance of the former than the latter for most of us up here—isn’t there? I’m on duty too to-morrow, and will follow the good example of my friend here.’

It was the signal for the break up of the party, and everybody shook hands with the host, and with each other. Men who parted thus in the Crimea well knew it was, to say the least, highly problematical whether they should ever meet again, and perhaps the thought made them feel more kindly towards their fellows.

The camp of the Light Division was on the right of, and next to, that of the 2nd Division, so Cope and Reginald Oakburne walked homewards together.

‘It’s odd we should have been such near neighbours, and yet not have met before this Cope,’ said his friend. ‘When did you get here?’

‘About a fortnight before Balaklava. I was in that affair the other day,—that sortie on your camp on the 26th. Two companies of ours were ordered out, though we had nothing to do. But my dear fellow that’s nothing. I heard a case only yesterday of two men who met accidentally in the trenches, great friends, and even connections in some way. One was on fatigue duty, the other on guard duty. They had not met for twelve years, when they ran across each other in this way, and they had only just said ‘how are you?’ when a shell came whizzing over the parapet and laid one of them as dead as Julius Cæsar,’ and Cope puffed furiously at his cigar.

‘Let us hope we shall have better fortune, old boy,’ replied the other. ‘Do you know,’ added he, ‘that I thought you had married Miss Beechcroft more than a year ago.’

‘No such luck, Oakburne. I tried,—I don’t mind owing to you,—and more than once too. But it was not to be. Another man had forestalled me. Confound him!

I know the beggar too,—a fellow who fancied himself a good deal. He was a man not at all unlike you, Rex.’

‘No no, Cope! I can’t stand that old boy. It’s my weak point. You know how I was thrown over, and how I suffered. I won’t deny that it cost me a bitter pang when I heard,—and till now I fully believed it,—that you had been accepted, though I would sooner have been second to you than to anyone else. But I am wrong after all then. You can believe me old fellow when I say how thoroughly I sympathise with you. They’re all the same. I daresay we’re both the happier as it is,’ and he grasped his friend’s hand heartily.

‘I think you’ve been a bit hard on her,’ said Cope with a slight tremour in his voice. ‘I don’t think she quite knew her own mind in those days. One of the few certainties I have grasped in my career is that precious few people do. I said goodbye to her for the last time just before I came away, and,—and she’s Miss Beechcroft still. Look here,’ added he after a somewhat lengthy pause, ‘you must come and look me up. Why not come to-morrow. To-morrow’s Sunday, you know. Come to breakfast.’

‘I will. Oddly enough I’ve a free morning to-morrow. Yes, I certainly will, Cope.’

They had reached the point where their roads separated, and halted for a moment in the drizzling mist which had begun to descend and which every moment grew denser.

‘I can’t say how glad I am that we have met again old fellow,’ said Reginald. ‘I was only wondering this evening whether we should ever see one another, and have a talk of the old times.’

‘So am I awfully glad, Rex. Mind you come ! Good night.’

‘Good night, Cope !’

So the two friends parted in the rain and the darkness, full of the reminiscences and conflicting emotions which their unexpected meeting, and their mutual affection and generous rivalry for the same flighty young lady, had called up. The sincerity of their friendship, however, made each forget any bitternesses and jealousies which the desire to win Sybil may in former days have aroused, and each looked forward with unfeigned pleasure to the prospect of renewing their intercourse on the morrow.

CHAPTER X.

How Reginald Oakburne got his Majority.

Few, few, shall part where many meet !
 The snow shall be their winding sheet,
 And every turf beneath their feet
 Shall be a soldier's sepulchre.—CAMPBELL,

A thousand glorious actions, that might claim
 Triumphant laurels, and immortal fame,
 Confus'd in crowds of glorious actions lie,
 And troops of heroes undistinguish'd die.—ADDISON.



OAKBURNE got but a poor night's rest after parting with his friend, and awaking towards morning from a troubled sleep, he rose, went to the tent door, and looked out. The rain was falling heavily, and, peering into the murky darkness, he heard faintly the distant church bells of Sebastopol tolling for some religious service. A weird melancholy sound it seemed, borne through that cheerless atmosphere, and the cold night-air made him shudder and called forth angry incoherent grumblings from the other occupant of the tent; so he closed the door hastily, and buried himself under the bed clothes. It seemed to him that he had hardly got to sleep again, when he and his comrade were roused by the now familiar sound of the rattle of musketry and became aware, after a few yawns and

ejaculations, that some one was standing in the entrance of the tent. It was one of the subalterns ! ‘Oakburne ! Lacy !’ cried he. ‘Look sharp ! The Russians are advancing ! We have to occupy the Sandbag Battery.’

They hurriedly accoutred themselves and ran to where the regiment was forming. All was hurry and confusion. The pickets had been driven in ; there had been a surprise ; and large bodies of the enemy were clambering up the slope and pouring on that weak point in the position of the allies to which Sir de Lacy Evans had so often in vain drawn attention. As they marched down through the heavy blinding rain, over the black slippery ground, cannon balls, shells, and rockets began falling among the tents behind, riving and shattering them, and dealing havoc and death to those in charge of the horses and engaged in camp duties. The enemy had got his guns into position on those very heights which Reginald had been dreamily contemplating a few hours before, and presently their artillery on the left, as well as the forts of Sebastopol and the ships in the harbour, opened their fire on the allies. The Russians were making another great effort to drive their foes from their vantage ground, and had this time selected the camp of the 2nd Division as the most favourable point for their attack.

As they neared the earthwork, Oakburne’s regiment passed through a storm of bullets, and, when they were close enough to distinguish them through the fog, they saw that swarms of Russian infantry,—who in their grey great coats were almost invisible till quite near,—were pressing up under cover of the thick brushwood. Some were already within the work, and others were climbing over the parapet, when the order was given to charge, and the enemy were hurled back before the bayonets of

the British. Of what follows Oakburne, like most of those who took part in the battle of Inkermann, can give but a confused account. He remembers how they kept on firing volley after volley, and repelling charge after charge with the bayonet; how the Russians seemed countless, and how the grey clad waves of men kept dashing with dogged devotion against the frail barrier opposed to them, till at last, by sheer weight, they drove out its defenders, and forced them back up the hill, fighting every inch of the way. Then suddenly they heard a cheer behind them, a forest of bearskins loomed through the mist, and the Grenadiers and Fusiliers charged past them, dashed at the battery they had evacuated, and drove the Russians from it down the slope.

After this the regiment was reformed and moved forward to defend another point of the plateau, against which the Russians were hurling from all sides fresh masses of troops. The men could scarcely see their determined foes, who seemed to spring from the dense thickets and the mist, till they were close upon them, nor tell whence the ceaseless shower of bullets came. It was all hand to hand fighting, a life and death struggle, amidst distress and confusion, between some 60,000 Russians and 8500 British soldiers.

Meanwhile at other points the 4th and Light Divisions had been led by their chiefs into the black ravines below, into gorges obscured by sulphurous smoke and blinding misty rain, and illumined only by the flashes of musketry. Their ranks broken by the underwood, outflanked, and outnumbered four to one, both bodies of men were forced to turn and cut their way back to the heights with fearful loss, the leader of the former being

slain and of the latter severely wounded. To advance was almost impossible, for none could tell whence the foe were coming, or their exact position, and commanders and men were alike bewildered. They could fight but they could not manœuvre. All that could be done was to hold the heights, so the gallant and devoted troops steadily met their resolute foes and drove them back for hour after hour ; firing, charging, and firing again ; sometimes retreating for a little, but only to rally and return again to the charge.

After some delay the British artillery is got into position, and then it is found not only that it is outnumbered by the Russians, but that the latter are opposing 12 pounder field guns and 32 pounder howitzers, to British 9 pounder guns, and 24 pounder howitzers. But the Russians are not inclined to allow their enemies to make use even of this inferior ordnance. Column after column is launched against the batteries and resolutely repelled. At last they reach one of the guns, driving back the artillerymen,—all save one sergeant. He stands alone with one arm round the muzzle, as if to save it, while with the other he lays low Russian after Russian who assails him, till he falls pierced by fifty bayonet wounds. But he does not die unavenged. Oakburne, standing not far off sees the danger, and calls on the men nearest to him to follow. He dashes at the gun, cutting down one Russian and shooting a second, the men behind him charge with the bayonet, and the gun is retaken. Hardly has this been done when they see a British officer lying on the ground among the brushwood, some twenty paces below, surrounded by four Russians. He draws his pistol and lays one low, but a second is just going to bayonet him when a private of Oakburne's company

leaps from the ranks and fells him with the butt end of his musket. The other two turn on this new assailant when Reginald, unable to restrain himself, runs to the rescue and cleaves one of them through the brain. The private soon disposes of the remaining fellow with his bayonet, and the pair assisted by a corporal, who has hurried up to help them, carry the wounded man they have rescued up the ridge, and,—Good Heavens! it is Cope! He had been shot in the chest while fighting his way from the gullies into which Sir George Brown, in order to make a diversion on the flank of the enemy, had led the Light Division till, finding itself between two Russian columns, it was forced to retreat with its gallant Commander seriously wounded. Cope smiles feebly as he recognises his friend, but he is too weak to speak. The corporal gives him some water out of his bottle, the ambulance carries him to the rear, and Reginald turns again to his duties.

It was indeed a time when men could scarcely pause to think, much less to regret. Failing ammunition and loss of men necessitated the withdrawal of the British artillery from action for a time, and it was not till two eighteen pounder iron siege guns had been got into position by Lieut.-Col. Dickson that the superior ordnance of the enemy could be held in check. The unequal contest had now lasted for more than six hours, and, though the courage of the British was unbroken, failing physical strength and decimated ranks began to weaken their resistance to the stubborn Russian legions who seemed to rise from the earth like the fabled host of warriors that sprung from the dragon's teeth which Jason sowed in the plains of Colchis. Their dense masses made a sudden rush on one of the batteries. The gloom made our

gunners uncertain whether they were friends or foes, and in their doubt they hesitated to fire. The Russians took immediate advantage of the error, and by the weight of overwhelming numbers, and the fierceness of their onset, drove all before them, bayonetting the artillerymen and spiking the guns. With wild shouts their struggling hosts won their way to the summit of the hill and for a moment all seemed lost.

Then our troops prepared to make one desperate effort to retrieve the day. The two brigades of the 2nd Division, the Light Division, the remnant of the 1400 Guardsmen, who had so heroically held the crest of the ridge and the Sandbag Battery, which they had won back at the beginning of the action, all rallied for a final charge. Supported by the unceasing fire of Dickson's two-gun battery they swept down the slope, pouring a deadly volley on the enemy. The Russians halted and returned it with one equally murderous, and then advanced again. But the steady fire made them waver, the British levelled their bayonets and charged, and, after a desperate hand to hand struggle, forced the enemy with a mighty effort pell mell down the ravine.

At this moment when another charge from the Russians might have changed the fortunes of the engagement, General Bosquet with some 6000 troops,—chasseurs, zouaves, and tirailleurs of Algiers,—appeared on their flank. While they were assailed by these, and galled by the fire of the French artillery, the British cheered by the timely aid, once more bore down upon them, and, driving their shattered columns in triumph into the valley below, decided the fate of the Battle of Inkermann. Once indeed after all seemed over, the Russians, taking advantage of our inactivity and of the obscurity caused

by a sudden return of the mist and rain, made another attempt to advance, but General Canrobert immediately directed his troops to attack them in flank, and quickly forced them to retire suddenly to Sebastopol. The work of bloodshed had ceased for the day, and there was time to breathe and to think, to tend the wounded and to bury the dead.

Gradually now men began to learn what had really happened, and what a great effort the Russians had made. How the chaunting and ringing of bells which they had heard in the silence of the night were part of impressive religious ceremonies in Sebastopol. How Bishops had solemnly blessed the army which had been newly reinforced by 30,000 men. How mass had been said, and how two grand dukes, the sons of the Czar, had come to take their share in the work of expelling the invader from the sacred soil of Russia. How addresses had been made, rewards promised, medals, and,—what was perhaps a still stronger incentive,—spirits had been distributed, and all that could be done had been done to work up the enemy's troops to that state of enthusiasm most conducive to victory. It was now found that two powerful armies had been sent forth to attack the British right and left wings, while another division made a feigned attack at Kadikoi, and a sortie from Sebastopol had diverted the attention of the French; that our allies had been engaged in a severe and quite distinct struggle; and that the fourth division of our own army had also had a separate assault to repel. Above all, it was discovered for the first time that there was a road, with the existence of which the allies were quite unacquainted, leading from Inkermann through the valley below, to the camp of the second division, and that it was by this route that the

Russians had moved their forces to the principal attack. Now too our troops had leisure to realise how terrible had been their losses ; that nearly all the commanders of the brigades or divisions which had been chiefly engaged in the battle had been either killed or wounded ; that 144 officers were reported as killed, wounded, or missing ; while the total number under these three heads was 2590 out of some 8500 men. The casualties among the 1400 men forming the brigade of guards amounted to 600, and when the second division, which had to resist the attack of the Russian centre, mustered after the battle, it was found to be only 300 strong. A major of one of the regiments, the senior of six field officers able to do duty, had to take charge of the remnant, and, as, out of sixty captains only twelve remained fit for service, Reginald found himself raised to the rank of major with a fair prospect of obtaining his lieutenant-colonelcy if he should be fortunate enough to survive such another battle. It was as the captain of the Enniskillens had said, the night before, a good time 'for getting steps.' Poor fellow ! though his regiment had not been called into action it had been under fire, and Oakburne learnt that a chance shell had ended his career for ever. He himself had not come altogether scatheless out of the terrible conflict but, with the happy fortune of some men, he had escaped with a wound,—a bayonet thrust in that arm of which the hand had already been injured,—which skilful treatment soon enabled him to disregard.

One of his first cares, as soon as he had leisure to do so, was to go to the hospital tents and enquire for Major Cope. As he was about to set out, an envelope with a great many different stamps and postmarks on it, and bearing evident marks of having been frequently re-

directed, was put into his hands. The writing was strange to him and, opening it with some curiosity, he found to his surprise that it came from Count Dorikoff, his kind-hearted captor at Giurgevo, who must have written it but a short time after they had parted at Odessa. It had followed him to Varna, got somehow mislaid, and been sent to England ; and now at last it had found its way to him in the Crimea. The Count, who wrote in French, and dated his letter from Moscow, informed his 'chère captif,' that he had returned to that city to be married to that Princess Olga, of whom Oakburne had often heard, and that if matters were soon settled, as he hoped, with England, he intended to travel with his wife in Europe. He had been speaking one day, he said, to his parents about the old friendship between his grandfather, Mr. Beechcroft, and the Chevalier Lèon, of which he and Reginald had so frequently talked together, and had then learnt for the first time a curious little fact which it might interest his correspondent to hear. His grandfather, it seemed, during his last visit to Europe, some few years before the French Revolution, had unexpectedly come upon his old companion the Chevalier at the town of Aix-les-Bains. He had found him very poor, and much broken in spirit. He was a widower, and quite alone, for, of the two daughters who formed his family, one had married from necessity a rich jeweller named Rovelli,—a match which, though it saved him from absolute poverty, had been a great blow to the Chevalier's pride,—while the other had been obliged to find a home in a rich English family. 'And where do you think this home was my friend,' continued the writer. 'Where, but in the house of that Chessington whose daughter my grandfather's other friend, Beechcroft, had married ! Was it

not a strange coincidence? This poor Chevalier Léon was nearly heart-broken with shame at the fortunes of his children. The jeweller, the husband of the elder, gave him the money to live with, but the proud old fellow could not bear their *ménage* and must live alone ; and, he gambled still ! My grandfather made him a feast the evening they met, did his best to cheer his heart, and he offered him a loan which the other would not take. He went again the next morning to his lodging to try and force him to do so, and found that the poor gentleman was dead,—he had died in the night of some injury to the heart. Was it not a sad ending?’

There was not much else in the letter save kind wishes for his happiness, and, having but little time to spare, he placed it in his desk and hurried off to see Cope, wondering much at this strange and unexpected confirmation of what his brother had told him of the history of the Léon and Rovelli families.

The blood-stained ground was covered with piles of the dead, where men of all arms of the service,—and in some cases of all three nations,—lay heaped together. Grave-diggers and litter-bearers were going about their work as unconcernedly as if it were the portorage of goods, or the cultivation of a garden, while camp followers, seamen from the ships, and vagabonds from Balaklava, were busily searching for trophies of the battlefield. Something made Reginald suddenly pause before one of the yawning pits, some thirty or forty feet deep and well nigh as broad, in which the dead were being laid as closely as they could be packed. He started back with an exclamation of horror. There lay the writer of the kind letter he had just been reading,—young Count Dorikoff. The laughing blue eyes were dull and cold, the lips that had smiled so

cheerily were parted and bloodless, the pale face stained with gore, but there was no mistaking the gallant, happy friend who had waved him his last goodbye from the pier at Odessa. There he lay, one of the mound of corpses waiting to be cast into their common grave ; side by side with his dead fellow countrymen, with Frenchmen, with red-coated Englishmen, some with a half smile on their face, others, like himself, expressionless, and others with the cruel scowl of hate on their brow, and fierce anger still in their eyes.

He turned away sick at heart, and walked on to the hospital tents. As he reached them, the train of arabas, ambulances, and French mule litters, which was constantly bearing the sick and wounded to Balaklava, whence they were being despatched in shiploads to Scutari, was just about to start. A faint voice hailed him from one of the ambulances, and as he ran up, the driver stopped for a minute.

‘Just in time, Rex!’ said Cope, feebly stretching out his hand. ‘Just in time! I thought you’d try and come.’

‘You’ll soon pick up again on the voyage old boy!’

The other nodded. ‘That breakfast never came off,’ he whispered, ‘but we’ll have a jolly meeting yet,—in better quarters!’

‘Goodbye and God bless you old friend!’ cried Reginald, and the melancholy procession jolted off on its way with its groaning, suffering burdens, and was soon lost to sight as it descended the rough, steep road, that led to the harbour.

Another meeting! poor fellow! If any man ever had the signs of death written plainly in his face it was poor Cope! No! for them there would be no more meetings here! So thought Oakburne as he walked rapidly back to

the camp of the second division. And yet his own lot was one which demands some sympathy. To be 'out of bed' more than half the week, to be exposed to constant danger and privation, to endure toil, sickness, hunger, wet, and cold, and yet be always on the alert and ready to risk his life in opposing an ever watchful enemy, are conditions of existence which should win for him who undertakes them cheerfully and courageously the compassion, if not the admiration, of his fellows. Reginald, however, full of pity and sorrow for the comrade, from whom he had just parted, forgot all his own hardships and the possibility of his being in a similar position. He little thought how soon he should be taking that same route to Scutari on which Major Cope had set out.

CHAPTER XI.

In which Mr. Portal becomes generous.

Sorrow, like a heavy-hanging bell,
Once set in ringing, with his own weight goes :
Then little strength rings out the doleful knell.

—SHAKESPEARE.

I never wonder to see men wicked, but I often wonder to see them not ashamed.—SWIFT.

POR Hoffbauer little thought what a legacy of troubles his dying gift to Chessington was destined to prove to the very man it was intended to benefit, or that his confidences respecting Frederica Ledru would so soon give trouble and anxiety to his friend Wilfrid Oakburne.

As soon as he had leisure to do so after the fatal catastrophe at Otterstone, the latter, remembering what Hoffbauer had told him of her poverty and friendless condition, wrote to tell the unfortunate lady of the tragic deaths of her husband and of her lover, and at the same time sent her a sum of money sufficient to help her in her necessities. Among Theodore's papers was found one in which,—though it had no pretensions to be called a will,—he requested that all that he possessed or might hereafter acquire, might be given to his dear friend Frederica Ledru. As, however, his small salary had been

in great part already spent, and Madam Rovelli, who had made decent provision for him in her will still survived, poor Frederica's prospects were very dismal unless some friend came forward to help her. Her parents and all her near relatives save old Madam Rovelli were dead, and, after the step she had taken in flying from her husband, she did not dare to apply to the latter or her daughter-in law, whom she knew would otherwise have been well disposed to help her. So at least she told Wilfrid in a very piteous letter in which she thanked him for his kindness, and implored him if he could, to see her at Lidfield.

Though he felt bound for the sake of his dead friend to accede to her request, Oakburne did so with a great deal of reluctance, as the odium he had unjustly suffered on account of Lois Simcox made him morbidly sensitive to exciting any gossip about himself in Lidfield. As soon, however, as his attendance at the inquest and other matters connected with the murder permitted it, he made arrangements for returning home ; for his visit to the north in company with Mr. Throckmorton had been for the time postponed, that gentleman, as has been shown, having found himself unexpectedly detained in order to assist Miss Beechcroft in carrying out her plans for going to the Crimea, while the business thrown on his hands by what had occurred at Otterstone had prevented Wilfrid from joining him at Thornbury.

It was late one November evening when Oakburne arrived at Lidfield. The London train had just come in as his own reached the opposite platform, and the passengers from each met at the exit where the tickets were collected. As he was giving his up he was accosted by a well-known voice behind him, and, turning, saw with

mingled surprise and displeasure that the speaker was Portal. He turned away and was about to make his way to a cab, when the latter, laying his hand on his shoulder, said he wanted to say a few words to him.

‘I don’t wonder you want to cut me Mr. Oakburne,’ said he, as Wilfrid shaking off his hand, asked very abruptly what he meant by speaking to him. ‘I injured you deeply once and have never had an opportunity of telling you how sincerely I deplore it.’ They had withdrawn a little from the entrance to the station, and were comparatively alone.

‘Indeed!’ replied Oakburne contemptuously. ‘I am glad to hear that you have the grace to acknowledge it at last.’

‘You naturally feel strongly on the subject,’ went on the other. ‘Let me, however, hope that bygones may be bygones. You are unaware perhaps that my father died a fortnight ago, and that I am coming down to settle his affairs.’

‘I regret to hear it,’ answered Wilfrid, coldly. He had known Mr. Portal, senior, more or less all his life, and the latter had written to him very feelingly with regard to his son’s behaviour respecting Lois Simcox. The news of his death, therefore, prevented him, as the speaker intended it should, from giving him a little more of his mind on the subject of this old quarrel, which he had originally resolved to settle in a more decided and practical manner.

‘I need not say how great the blow has been to me,’ said Portal, with much feeling, though, to tell the truth, he had borne his affliction with considerable fortitude, being perhaps the better enabled to do so because it gave him an unexpected release from the pecuniary embarrassments

which he had fallen into. 'You can imagine what my sorrow has been. It has, I hope, changed me for the better. Coming as it did just after my engagement to a young lady whom my poor dear father in every way approved, and whom I had hoped shortly to have introduced to him, the shock was doubly great to me.'

Oakburne, though he distrusted the fellow all the while, could not help feeling a little softened by this appeal to his compassion.

'I am sorry for you, Mr. Portal, I am sure!' he said in a mollified tone. 'I don't want to dwell on the past now, so let us, as you say, agree to forget it. What is the business that you want to talk to me about?'

'It was with regard to that terrible tragedy at Otterstone Hall, and the fate of poor Hoffbauer. What an awful thing it was! You were there, weren't you?'

Wilfrid replied that he had been.

'Ah yes! I saw your name mentioned in the papers,' continued Portal, to whom that matter had indeed been an 'awful' one, making him very thankful that he had escaped being implicated in it, and swear solemnly to himself that he would never have anything more to do with people likely to commit such crimes. 'Yes, I saw your name, and compliment you on your courage and presence of mind. As you are doubtless aware, I had some acquaintance with Mr. Chessington, and I knew a little also of Hoffbauer and his murderer. I won't detain you now; but if you could look in at my office to-morrow you would do me a great favour. There is a rather important point connected with the affair on which I should like to talk to you.'

Oakburne felt unpleasantly surprised. What could this important point be? Ought he to hear it or to re-

fuse? He felt strongly inclined to the latter course, but then the thought occurred to him that he might possibly learn something that would be of benefit to Frederica Ledru, and he felt that he ought not to shrink from anything that could prove of assistance to her. After a moment's hesitation, therefore, he agreed to come.

'Thank you! Thank you most sincerely, Oakburne! At twelve o'clock to-morrow morning, then, at my office. All well at home, I hope? But I forgot you have not yet had an opportunity of learning!' and with a most *empressé* good-night, he hurried away.

'What can he have to tell me?' thought Wilfrid, as he drove homewards. 'It all sounds plausible enough, but to the end of my days I can never believe Portal.'

He had been so long away from home that his mother and sister were very eager to see him, and the three had so much to tell each other that the evening passed very pleasantly and rapidly. Early next morning he made his way to the lodging which Madam Ledru had named as her address, the corner house of a little narrow street leading to the church, over the door of which was the neatly printed inscription, "The Keys of the Church." The wife of the parish clerk, to whom the house belonged, was rather astonished to see who her visitor was. 'I thought it was some one come after the Church,' said she. Occasionally tourists who wandered out of beaten paths, or an antiquary in search of matter for exploration, would come to look at the fine old church of which Lidfield folk were justly proud.

'I wanted to see the lady who is lodging here, Mrs. Brian,' answered Wilfrid.

'Ah! do you now? Well, I'll tell her. She seems very strange, poor thing, almost crazed like. I don't

know nothing of her myself. A gentleman brought her here and took the rooms, and he hasn't been again since ; and she's very down like, poor lady. Of course *I* don't ask no questions,' and she hobbled away, and presently returning, asked Wilfrid to 'step up, please, to the parlour.'

Poor Frederica received him with a joyful cry. 'Oh ! I am so pleased that you have at last come to me, Herr Oakburne,' said she, and there was no mistaking the truth of her statement. He was quite shocked to see the change which sorrow had wrought in the handsome, stately woman he had been wont to see when she visited Hoffbauer during his illness in Poulford Street. All her old fire seemed gone. Her eyes were sunken, her face lined with care, her figure bowed, and her manner timid and shrinking, and he was quite startled to see a great band of grey hair amidst her glossy black tresses. She had been now for nearly a month with scarcely a soul to speak to, and the mere opportunity of opening her heart to one she knew seemed an intense relief. This life of imprisonment, after her flight from her husband, had been suddenly broken in upon by the news of that worthy's death at the hands of her lover, and of the murder of the latter, whom she loved more than anyone else on earth and regarded as her only protector and friend. The blow had been doubly hard to bear in this solitude, and the utter estrangement from her fellow-creatures had preyed upon her health and spirits.

'I thought I must have gone mad !' said she. 'My life has been like some horrid nightmare that would never end itself. I have scarcely dared to walk out much, and but for that church, with the pretty, quiet

God's Acre, which has been my sanctuary, I believe Herr Oakburne that I could not have borne it! Every day my money got less, and I have not been able to get always the food that I should eat, though Heaven knows I have little appetite to eat at all!

Oakburne, touched by her recital of her troubles, assured her now that she would have no more need for anxiety, and that he had come to help her in whatever way he could. 'I promised my poor friend that I would,' said he. 'And you may trust me to keep my word.'

The mention of Hoffbauer upset the unhappy lady altogether. She burst into a flood of tears, and then, after a time, poured out to him the history of her life. It was evidently good for her to do so, and he therefore allowed her to tell her story, though, as the reader is aware, Hoffbauer had related it to him on the night of his death. One point in it, however, Wilfrid had forgotten, and that was how Portal had promised to aid her husband in acquiring for himself the sum that she would be entitled to on the death of old Madam Rovelli. It suddenly struck him now what sort of communication the solicitor might probably make to him, and an idea occurred to him as to the manner in which he should receive it. When she had concluded, he spoke such words of consolation as suggested themselves to him, telling her that he was sure Walter Chessington would be most willing to help her, and adding that he knew of others whom he thought would do so. 'In any case though you may rely on me, Madam Ledru,' said he, 'and may trust me to keep my promise to Theodore. I can't help thinking, however, that the happiest and wisest course for you would be to return to Madam Rovelli.'

‘I cannot! I dare not!’ cried she. ‘I dare not go back there now!’ and she covered her face with her hands.

‘Won’t you let me intercede with Madam Rovelli?’ answered Wilfrid. ‘I am sure that she would receive you gladly. Do let me try at all events.’

After a great deal of pressing, poor Frederica at last consented that he should do this, and Wilfrid, finding it was time to keep to his appointment with Portal, left promising to do all in his power to settle matters.

It was pleasant enough to come home again successful, he thought to himself, as he walked down the town, and to have carried out at least part of that plan he had made for himself on the hillside three years ago. True, that other half which related to Beatrice Elkfield had failed miserably enough, but he could afford to laugh at that now; and had grown to congratulate himself on his freedom. He must go and see the Elkfields and the Bolderwoods of Slopely, and all his old friends, and he would walk over to Rollhill and see Mr. Simcox who, Ethel told him, had now given up the school, and lived there altogether with his sister and brother-in-law, and he reached the offices of Messrs. Portal, Quipson, and Portal, full of agreeable schemes for occupying himself during his visit to Lidfield.

When he told one of the three clerks who were seated on high stools in the outer office, that he wished to see Mr. Portal, a responsive grin passed over the faces of that acute trio. Portal, contrary to custom, happened to be coming out of his sanctum, and greeted him with a cordiality that was rather embarrassing.

‘How *are* you, Oakburne! It is very good of you to

come, my dear fellow !' says he, grasping Wilfrid warmly by the hand. ' Pray, step into my room.'

The truth was that Portal was anxious to guard against any revival of the ugly stories about himself, and was therefore well pleased that Oakburne should come to his place of business. The scandal about Lois, coming as it did at election time, was indeed, owing to her death, his own well-timed absence, and Mr. Simcox's departure from Lidfield, pretty well consigned to oblivion. Still these things are never altogether forgotten ; ill-natured people might possibly choose to rake up the unpleasant episode ; and, he thought that on the whole he could not provide a better defence against them than by showing publicly that there had been a complete reconciliation between himself and the man whom he had so injured in the matter.

' You wished to speak to me about this affair of poor Hoffbauer,' said Wilfrid, when they were comfortably seated in the room in which the solicitor interviewed his most important clients.

' Yes. It was respecting that that I wanted to have a talk with you, Oakburne, for I know you were very good to him, and took a great interest in the poor beggar ; I'll just tell you what I consider important in the matter.' Portal then proceeded to tell him how Hoffbauer had shewn him all the papers proving his descent from George Chessington ; how he had reason to know that Lord Ashleigh had in his possession certain letters, very important letters, written by a certain George Chessington, and how, putting two and two together, he had come to the conclusion that there was good ground for presuming that Hoffbauer had been in reality the rightful owner of Otterstone. He pretended very skilfully to imagine that

all this was quite new to his hearer, though he knew well enough from Hoffbauer's own lips that the latter had confided all he knew concerning his family history to Wilfrid. The existence of the letters was, he was quite sure, known only to himself and Lord Ashleigh, but he mentioned that fact as if it were a part of the rest of the transaction. Wilfrid, who listened very attentively, wondering what was coming next, informed him that he had heard most of this before, at which he expressed well feigned astonishment.

‘Dear me ! I had no idea of it,’ cried he. ‘He of course consulted me in a professional way, and was, as I imagined, by way of being rather mysterious about the whole business. You saw the papers then ? Do you know what has become of them ?’ and he looked at him rather eagerly, concealing with some difficulty the anxiety with which he awaited the answer to this question.

The answer came slowly. No. Wilfrid did not know what had become of them. They were not among Hoffbauer's other effects as far as he knew, and he had never seen them since. This was of course the truth, for he was as yet entirely ignorant of the fact that they had been given to Walter Chessington, and had indeed wondered where they were.

Portal's face fell visibly as he heard this news. He had in reality all along hoped that they had come into Oakburne's possession, and that he might induce him to let him see them. He, however, speedily concealed his vexation.

‘That is very strange !’ cried he. ‘That is not as it should be ! I think a search ought to be instituted for those papers, Oakburne.’

‘May I ask what object there could be in getting them

back now?' asked the other quickly. 'Now that Hoffbauer is dead, and as he has left no heirs, I don't see what good they could do to anyone.'

The question was rather an awkward one for Portal. He had counted on Oakburne's having the documents. His real object was to work on Lord Ashleigh's fears through them, and at the same on Wilfrid's sympathy for his dead friend. It had seemed to him that they contained the germs of a pretty little will case. By careful enquiries he too, as well as Walter Chessington, had discovered the awkward fact that if Hoffbauer's identity could be established the will of James Chessington, under which Lord Ashleigh's nephew held the property, could be proved to be invalid. His desire had been therefore to see the documents once more, make copies of them, and then ascertain the rightful heirs and either prevail on them to attack Lord Ashleigh with this information or do so himself. He had hoped that Wilfrid might have been induced to unbosom himself to him through his desire to do justice to the claims of the deceased Hoffbauer. He had, therefore, in his previous calculations not thought much of the possibility of this rather natural enquiry being put to him.

'I did not know he had left no heirs,' answered he, in some confusion. 'That is, I was not sure of it. One never knows, you know, who may turn out to be an heir to a property. But,—but, to tell the truth,' as a bright thought here struck him, 'to tell the truth, that poor woman Madam Ledru, with whom our poor friend had that unfortunate intimacy, is left penniless I believe. Her husband, — a regular villain! but we come across some queer characters in our professional experience!—her villain of a husband left all he possessed to

a mistress with whom he had been living for the last two years. I say all he possessed, but the brute drank so that it was found that, though he was supposed to be so wealthy, he had muddled away the greater part of it. I thought then, I say, that if there was no heir, or other person interested in proving his descent, some claim might be made on the Chessington family, on behalf of this unhappy creature, whom I knew, and indeed esteemed, and whom, in spite of her faults I sincerely pity. Her husband treated her like a dog, poor thing! Yes! I pity her most sincerely!’ and Portal concluded with quite a little tremor of feeling in his voice, and blowing his nose loudly, drew himself up in his chair with the air of a virtuous man deprecating his own generosity and magnanimity.

Wilfrid listened to him with an unfeigned astonishment, which helped him to smother any rising expression of the deep disgust he felt for this would-be philanthropist. That anyone who had acted as he knew Portal to have done, with regard to poor Frederica, could speak in such a manner, both of her and of that husband with whom he had conspired to injure her, while it filled him with loathing and scorn, took him for the moment quite by surprise, and he felt that he had never before realised the depths of lying and meanness in the man.

‘But I thought that she had disappeared,’ said he at last, disguising his feelings with an effort.

‘Yes, it is true; but we can always advertise for her. After all, too, it is possible that Hoffbauer might have given over these papers to her! Of course we must have them to establish any claim on her behalf against the Chessingtons. Yes! she might have them! And so might perhaps Walter Chessington who, of course, if

asked, is too honourable to hesitate a moment to surrender them ! Yes, for her sake we must get hold of them somehow ! Poor thing ! We must really advertise for her, Oakburne !' cried he enthusiastically. 'I would give a great deal to be able to succour her in her distress ! It is such a hard fate !'

This was too much for Wilfrid. 'Are you aware, Mr. Portal,' said he sternly, 'that the object of your benevolent solicitude is in this very town now, not two hundred yards away from this room ?'

'What ! here in Lidfield !' cries Portal, turning very pale not only at the unexpected information, but at the tone of the speaker.

'Yes, here in Lidfield I saw her this very morning, and at our interview she told me, as Hoffbauer had told me before, on the very night on which he died, of the share *you* had in making the life of that poor woman miserable. Yes ! and not only that, but how you and that devil Reuben Ledru had planned between you to get these papers of Hoffbauer's from him, and use them for your own vile purposes ! I know it all, I say, and I forbid you to disgust me any more with your abominable lies, and mock benevolence !' and Wilfrid rose, and going up to Portal, stood over him, so to speak, looking down on him with one hand on the table close to his chair. Perhaps the memory of his old injuries rose in his heart and increased his righteous indignation against the man.

'There is some mistake ! It is false ! There have been base misrepresentations, Mr. Oakburne !' cried the other in abject terror. 'For Heaven's sake, man, don't speak so loud !' and he pointed with a trembling hand to the clerk's room next door. His glib audacity had

suddenly all vanished, and had been replaced by a cringing and pitiful agitation.

‘Look here, Portal,’ said Oakburne, ‘I know enough of your conduct to show that you were a party to the attempt to get these papers from Hoffbauer. No! there’s no good denying it! You were, though you left the dangerous part to your accomplice. More than this, you were also a party to the project of robbing Madam Ledru of the inheritance she will have from Madam Rovelli. Don’t interrupt me. I say I know these things, and I can prove them too. I understand the law sufficiently to know that I know enough, if not to get you punished as a criminal, at least to get you struck off the roll of solicitors,—to ruin you, in short.’

‘Well!’ hissed the other with a momentary gleam of hate and fury in his eyes. ‘Well?’

‘Well, unless you consent in writing to do what I ask, I will make the best use I can of my knowledge.’

‘Spare me! spare me!’ cried Portal piteously. ‘Remember this was in the past. I am changed! I swear to God I am changed! And I knew nothing of these schemes of wicked violence! on my honour, I was as innocent as you are of all idea of the murder or robbery. I was wicked, foolish,—I own it, but I was terribly pressed! And I have bitterly repented! I swear it most solemnly. Remember the sorrow that has fallen on me! Think of my poor mother,—think how you will blight the happiness of an honest young girl who loves me! I meant to make reparation to Madam Ledru—on my honour, I did! I swear it! For pity’s sake Oakburne spare me! do not ruin me thus!’ In the extremity of fear called forth by the unexpected revealing of a secret which he imagined had died with

Reuben Ledru, and the dread of shame and exposure just as he was on the point of beginning a new career that promised every success, the man's shrewd readiness and clever impudence deserted him, his nerve completely gave way, and Portal fell on his knees.

'Get up! You need not beg any more' said Oakburne, regarding him with stern contempt, 'We have agreed to forget the past, and——'

'God bless you, Oakburne! yours is a noble heart!' ejaculated the other fervently as he rose to his feet.

'I have consented that, as you say, bygones shall be bygones, Portal, and on one condition I will keep my word as to this new matter, as well as with regard to the poor girl whom you ruined and accused me of ruining. And this is the condition. I will only hold my tongue—and remember that I was an important witness both at the trial and the inquest and have Madam Ledru to back me,—I only consent, I say, to be silent on condition that you promise, in writing, to make the reparation you have just said you intended making to poor Frederica.'

'I will pay what you like!' cried the other. 'Make your own terms, Oakburne. I tell you, I swear most solemnly it is true! I always intended to make reparation!'

'Well, as she had been nearly starving, I don't think,—considering that you tried to take her money from her,—that £100 is too high a figure to name. I am trying to reconcile her to her relations. If you will draw out a cheque for £100 payable to her, and promise me in writing to help me to pay for her needs till she is placed beyond the necessity of help, I will make that the price of my silence.'

Portal drew a cheque book from a drawer, and

hurriedly wrote a draft for the amount named. 'There!' he gasped out, handing it to Oakburne, 'Let that be an earnest of my intention! and,—and, look here, I think there is some small amount, about £100 a year, out of what has escaped from Ledru's creditors, which I think I might be able perhaps to rescue from the clutches of the woman to whom he has left everything.'

Wilfrid pondered a moment. 'Give me a written promise,' said he, 'and I will agree. But mind it must be such a promise as my solicitor will be able to assure me is a binding undertaking on your part.'

Portal winced, hesitated a moment, and then wrote what was required of him, and handed it to Wilfrid, who placed both it and the cheque in his pocket.

'Now I am satisfied,' said he, 'provided I learn this is a document that will be recognised by the Courts of Law; but remember that if I learn that you have in any way failed in your promise, I shall be always ready to put it in force against you. Provided, however, that you keep your word, I swear most solemnly that you need not fear that I will ever make use of my knowledge. And now I think our interview had best end.'

'For Heavens sake, I implore you, part amicably from me in the presence of my clerks!' said Portal abjectly. 'I know you would not wittingly ruin my reputation.'

Wilfrid nodded, and then the other, recovering his natural assurance with an ease that astonished, and a little alarmed him, accompanied him to the door, and, much to his disgust, went through the same farce of cordial leave-taking as he had executed at their meeting, this time insisting on going with him to the entrance of the office, so that passers by in the street might witness his last adieu.

Oakburne responded with what grace he could, and walked rapidly home.

He had had a revenge he little anticipated, and felt proportionately elated. At any rate he had made good terms for Frederica Ledru. 'Though I don't know,' said he to himself, 'if I am not compounding a felony ! I wish I knew more about such things. At any rate my threat brought him on his knees, and that shows that there is something in it, though of course I have no other evidence than Frederica's oath. As for this promise I will find out its real value from my solicitor as soon as possible. It seems clear though, that he will not dare to break it, for it is evident that he would sell his soul now for the sake of keeping up his character for respectability in Lidfield. I suppose just now I took him at a fearful disadvantage ; and even he deserves some pity, perhaps ! But, faugh ! it is awful to think of such meanness !' and he went to luncheon, well satisfied with his morning's work, and as soon as he could do so, sent the cheque for £100 to Madam Ledru.

As for Portal, the reader may be left to imagine his feelings. Perhaps the bitterest drop in the unpleasant cup he had had to swallow was that he had been outwitted by Wilfrid Oakburne, for whose honest simplicity he had always felt a secret contempt. It was very galling to have been thus defeated by such a man, and at this time he grudged the £100 very much. Nevertheless, in spite of his mortification, he was able to console himself by reflecting that he had escaped from a most awkward predicament uncommonly cheaply ; for he felt that though there was no written agreement between them, he could rely on Wilfrid's keen sense of honour without the slightest fear, and he was pretty sure

that he need dread no further drains on his purse from him. Then too, best of all, he had gone very far towards persuading people that he and Oakburne were thoroughly reconciled, and had thus been successful in one at least of his objects for seeking this interview with him.

CHAPTER XII.

*Shows how Mr. Simcox found an old volume, and how
Mr. and Mrs. Chessington went into exile.*

Spring shall come round, and all her sounds be dear,
And sweet her lips with all ambrosial dew,
The wooing sun shall set earth's heart astir,
And she rejoice, and we have rapture too,
But one hushed cord shall no more answer her.

—C. FRASER TYTLER.

We leave the well-beloved place
Where first we gazed upon the sky ;
The roofs, that heard our earliest cry,
Will shelter one of stranger race.—TENNYSON.



ON the morning after the scene described in the last chapter, Wilfrid set out to visit Mr. Simcox at Rolhill. His interview with Portal had revived all his bitter memories, with regard to their mutual connection with Lois, and his pity for the worthy schoolmaster, whose sad lot he could not help contrasting with that of the man who had destroyed his happiness, and driven his daughter into an early grave. The lonely church on the down, and the familiar scenery, recalled very vividly all the incidents of his friendship with her, and yet it seemed hard to realise how comparatively brief a period had passed since its

sad ending. The day was a very different one from that one in early spring on which he had last seen Rolhill, a year and a half ago, for now the woods on the distant hills were bare and leafless, the fertile plain on the farther side looked drear and gloomy, and both hills and plain were half-shrouded in grey November mists ; but Caius Whitworth's house and all its surroundings were just as he had always remembered them as a boy. Life in this isolated spot seemed always to present the same quiet monotony, and even the master and mistress of the Blue Boar seemed to share its prevailing characteristic, and remain always unchanged.

When Mr. Whitworth mentioned his name to the schoolmaster, whom he found walking in the garden, Wilfrid saw his face suddenly light up, and he hurried to meet him with an evident pleasure that touched the young doctor very much. He was rather shocked to see the change in his appearance, for his sorrows had aged him prematurely and, though in reality younger, he looked a good ten years older than his brother-in-law. 'He'll be very pleased to see you, Mr. Oakburne,' said the latter, 'for he often speaks of you, and I take it very kind of you to remember us, sir,' and then he told Wilfrid that poor Mr. Simcox's mental powers had been a good deal weakened by the shock of his daughter's death, and that he passed a great part of his time at her grave, or in the church where she had performed her humble duties during the last few months of her life. When not there he would rest in the little garden at the back, or pace quietly up and down it, on the walk in front of the south wall, against which the fruit trees were trained. All his thoughts, said Caius Whitworth, were full of the dead girl, and he could be

got to take but little interest in other matters. He seemed contented enough, and at times almost happy, but he had ceased to be the active, intelligent man of old days, who delighted in teaching and in acquiring fresh knowledge himself. He had become a quiet dreamer, waiting with resignation for the day that should end his sorrows, and unite him again to the daughter he loved.

‘It is very good of you, sir, to come to see me,’ said the schoolmaster, in reply to Oakburne’s greeting. ‘It is very kind. But I knew you would come. They have all been very kind to me—everyone is, sir. I like to walk here, Mr. Oakburne. She used to like it they tell me. Dear Lois would often come here, sir. But I like best to be in the church, or to sit by her grave. I have planted some flowers there, and I like to keep them fresh and beautiful. I must show them to you, sir; you will pardon me for saying so,—but you must come with me to see her grave.’

Wilfrid told him that he had stopped there already on his way.

‘Ah! I knew you would, Mr. Oakburne! but if you will allow me, I should like to visit it with you, sir. The flowers are nearly all over now, but in the spring they will come up again. Will you come?’

Wilfrid felt bound to give a kindly consent. ‘I hear you often see people from Lidfield,’ said he. ‘My sister said that she had paid you a visit, and I suppose Mr. Elkfield and Mrs. Chessington have been too?’

‘Yes, both sir! and the rector too, Mr. Lumley. Yes! Mrs. Chessington,—Miss Beatrice Elkfield she was, you know,—she has been most kind. So she was before Lois died. She married that young Mr. Chessington,—dear me how time flies! And that reminds me,’

and his expression suddenly became keener, 'that reminds me that I have made a discovery, Mr. Oakburne.'

'A discovery! what is it?' asked Oakburne, smiling.

'It is a discovery, sir, which was interesting to me, though I don't suppose it is of any importance now to anyone. If you don't mind coming to the church, as I suggested, I will show it to you,' and he led the way eagerly up the rise.

Mr. Simcox's discovery was simply this. In the church tower at Rolhill,—much admired by the way for its architecture,—there was, as is still to be found in some few of our old churches, what is known as a priest's room. It was a comfortless cell, designed to enable the ecclesiastic, if inclined to vigil, to pass the night under shelter, but without any temptations to luxury, and was therefore so constructed as to prevent anyone from lying down in it, or even sitting, save in the most constrained posture. It was lighted by two long and very narrow windows, one of which opened on to the roof, and on it just outside this window, was a quaintly hideous figure of the Arch Fiend, with demon countenance, hoofs, claws, and outstretched wings, ready to fly into the room and attack the good pastor whilst pursuing his ghostly exercises. Whether this very realistic image helped to check the wandering thoughts of divines who were driven, during their sojourn in the priest's room, to look out of the window, it need not be attempted here to discuss. All that it is necessary to tell the reader now is, that Mr. Simcox, while contemplating its hideousness, chanced to overbalance himself and stumble forwards. In so doing he discovered a deep, oblong, stone recess, under the window sill, on the inner side,

which, but for this chance accident, the dim light in the room would never have enabled him to see. How it came there, whether through carelessness or stupidity, or with a fraudulent design, could not be known, but in this recess was an old parish register for the year 1788, and this ancient volume, damp, tattered, and mouldy, Mr. Simcox now showed with great triumph to Wilfrid Oakburne.

‘It is indeed a strange discovery,’ says the latter, looking curiously at this treasure, some of the leaves of which were torn, some few burnt, and the writing in many of the others partially obliterated by time and wet. It was evident that there were portions of it which the parish priest desired to consign to oblivion.

‘Yes, sir! it is a remarkable thing, certainly!’ Poor Mr. Simcox had always taken a great interest in antiquities, and had compiled a very praiseworthy book on those of Lidfield and its neighbourhood. ‘It is indeed remarkable, and I consider myself most fortunate in finding it two days ago. On Sunday I hope to show it to the vicar,’ added he complacently. ‘But the most strange coincidence is this,—look here,’ and turning over some pages he pointed out to Wilfrid a marriage certificate, in which the writing was still quite legible, though much faded.

Our doctor gave a start and a little exclamation. It was no other than the registration of the marriage of George Chessington to Estelle Lèon, witnessed by George Bolton of Otterstone, and performed by F. J. Whitworth, the copy of which the reader has already learnt that poor Hoffbauer had discovered at Otterstone the night before his death. Never having seen this copy, Oakburne, as

may be imagined, was a good deal struck by the sight of the original.

‘I should not at all wonder, now, if that turned out to be some ancestor of our young member’s!’ said Mr. Simcox, knowingly, ‘and it is very singular that, as he comes from quite a different county, it should be found here!’ The schoolmaster, stirred by his discovery, spoke like his old self, and his former air of dreamy wistfulness changed to one of triumphant eagerness. ‘I should like you to ascertain that now, Mr. Oakburne,’ said he, ‘if you will be so good, for I am sure Mr. Chessington would like to hear of it.’

‘No doubt he will,’ replied Wilfrid abstractedly. The sight of this old register coming just after his interview with Portal, raised a train of thought which made him for some moments pre-occupied, and he scarcely heeded the discourse which Mr. Simcox continued to pour into his ear, as to other remarkable entries in the volume, its interest to the antiquary, and so forth. He at last roused himself sufficiently to congratulate the schoolmaster once more on his discovery, and to ask him to make a copy of this special certificate for him, and to send it to him at Lidfield. This the good man willingly agreed to do, and Wilfrid, after he had gone with him to his daughter’s grave, returned home.

Mr. Simcox’s discovery set him thinking a good deal, and when he got back to London at the beginning of the following week, he determined to consult Mr. Throckmorton about it. The only conclusion he himself could come to was that, though it appeared to confirm the idea that Hoffbauer was the lineal descendant of George Chessington, the death of the former put an end to any further conse-

quences in the matter. He was, therefore, considerably astonished when his friend, after hearing his story, told him that it by no means put an end to the matter at all, but that, on the contrary, it appeared to him to raise very serious issues. With his knowledge of the claims of his late friend General Beechcroft, he speedily made up his mind, as Walter Chessington and Portal had already done, that Sybil Beechcroft was by this discovery made the heiress of Otterstone.

‘But of course all this could only be proved by the evidence of the documents showing Hoffbauer’s descent,’ said he. ‘Do you know what has become of them, Wilfrid?’

Wilfrid was obliged to answer that he did not know; that they certainly were not among the papers which the dead man had left, and that he was unable to conjecture what had become of them, unless Walter Chessington had found them; and then the two men looked at each other significantly.

‘I am sure he would have told me if he had found them,’ said Oakburne sharply, and then he fell to staring at the fire. He could not bear to think that he should have a share in doing an injury to Walter Chessington, his friend, and Beatrice’s husband. On the other hand, however, was not this Miss Beechcroft the very girl whom his brother Reginald had been attached to? It was a strange and unpleasant complication enough.

‘Of course, without these papers things remain as they are,’ said Mr. Throckmorton. ‘The only question is, ought you to write to Chessington about them?’

Wilfrid could not exactly see that he ought to write; at least it was not his business as far as he could judge.

Mr. Throckmorton thought that, in a way, it *was* his

duty to write. And then they argued the matter over and ended, like most arguers do, in keeping their respective opinions. The subject, as tending to lead to unpleasant differences, was therefore for a time banished by mutual consent from their talk, and Wilfrid continued to feel great doubt and perplexity regarding it.

It will therefore be seen that the history and descent of Theodore Hoffbauer, whom the reader will doubtless have regarded as a rather disreputable character, was destined to work great changes in the fortunes of most highly respectable families, and that the discovery of his grandmother's marriage certificate, coming as it did through separate channels to two or three different people at the same time, some of whom were ignorant of the others' knowledge, created a considerable amount of anxiety and division in their respective households. It is partly in order to make this clear that the facts given in this and in the preceding chapter have been recorded. Had the narrator been writing a mere romance, instead of editing a veracious history, it might perhaps have been possible to have confined himself to simply stating Walter Chessington's view on the subject ; but then the reader would not have understood the peculiar light in which Messrs. Portal, Throckmorton, and Oakburne, regarded it, or how it even created a little estrangement between the two latter.

The misunderstanding between Mr. Throckmorton and his friend was suddenly put an end to by a letter, which, much to his surprise, Wilfrid Oakburne received from Walter Chessington, one morning towards the end of November. The latter wrote, telling Oakburne how the documents that he enclosed had been given him by Hoffbauer ; how he had come to the con-

clusion, after carefully studying them, that they completely upset his own title to the property; and that, if he was right in his surmises, it was his intention to surrender it to Miss Beechcroft of Thornbury Grange, to whom, as it seemed to him, the estate would now revert. As he had learnt from Hoffbauer that Wilfrid had a full knowledge of most of the details of the subject, he would be much obliged if he would be so good as to hand over the papers in question to his friend Mr. Edward Throckmorton, Miss Beechcroft's legal guardian, and explain to that gentleman such points in connection with them as might require it. He had, he continued, so far presumed on Wilfrid's friendship as to write himself to Mr. Throckmorton by the same post, telling him his interests in the matter, and that he had begged Wilfrid to consult him with regard to it, after which he hoped to call on him in person. The letter then concluded with a request to Wilfrid to come down at his earliest convenience to Twickenham, where he and his wife were renting a small house at No. 7 Ferry Cross Terrace. 'We are quite alone, so please come without ceremony, either to luncheon or dinner, as suits you best. But above all, come as soon as you conveniently can, and you will most exceedingly oblige, yours very sincerely,

'WALTER CHESSINGTON.'

'Is it not an extraordinary thing?' said Wilfrid to Mr. Throckmorton, as they were discussing the contents of their letters. 'Imagine poor Hoffbauer having really been the owner of Otterstone, unknown to anybody, and only finding it out on the eve of his death!'

'Plenty of things just as strange have happened,' replies the other.

'I should have been inclined to doubt the plenty

myself, Mr. Throckmorton; but of course you ought to know better than I do. But certainly the rarest and most pleasing thing in the business is the noble way in which Chessington has acted.'

'Noble? Well! hum! I should call noble rather too strong an epithet. Remember he is only doing his duty after all,—an unpleasant duty, I grant you,—but still only his bounden duty.'

'I think you are rather stingy in your approval of him!' cried Wilfrid, warmly. 'Remember what a sacrifice this entails, not only on him, but on all connected with him. If he had quietly destroyed this copy of the marriage certificate, which no one could have suspected, much less proved to be in his possession, he would have done no great harm, for your ward, Miss Beechcroft, knew nothing of all this, and is rich already. I don't believe one in a hundred would have acted as he has!'

'What! you at your age have so cynical an opinion of your fellow-men! I hope it will improve as you grow older. I, for my part, have more faith in human nature, and, though I own I think his conduct does your friend great credit, I believe that five out of every ten would do the same. I wonder how far Mrs. Chessington approves of her husband's proceedings,' added he, rather slyly.

'Of course she approves,' said Wilfrid, decidedly. 'At least, I hope so, I'm sure,' he added, after a pause. 'He says they are alone; and I've no doubt all the rest of the family disapprove. I sympathise thoroughly with them!'

'No doubt,' answered Mr. Throckmorton, drily. 'But for Heaven's sake, don't let us begin to discuss Chessington's proceedings, or I shall be late at chambers.'

Of course you will go and see him, and then you must tell him that all this is horribly irregular, which he, as a barrister, ought to have remembered.'

'Irregular ! how do you mean ?'

'I mean,' says Mr. Throckmorton, rising to make his preparations, 'I mean my giving an opinion in this way, on an important case in which I may be a party on the opposite side, for of course Lord Ashleigh and his mother and sister will have to fight this, in his interest. And then he must know that this ought to come to me through a solicitor ! Dear me ! how many years is it since I first gave an opinion as to this Otterstone case !' and he took two or three turns up and down the room as his wont was, when excited. 'But, of course, I understand ! Poor fellow, it is hard ! Lord Ashleigh, if I know anything of him, will fight this tooth and nail. He will be furious with his nephew.'

'Do you know Lord Ashleigh, then ?' asked Wilfrid.

'Well, yes, I did, years ago,' answered the other. 'He married a young Scotch girl, an heiress, to whom your uncle, Edward Oakburne, my college friend, was much attached, and, in a way engaged. I know she returned his attachment, but her parents were opposed to it, and wanted her to marry Lord Ashleigh, and his title dazzled her, and she did. He spent all her money,—he was a terrible gambler in those days,—and, never having cared for her, neglected her. She said he ill-treated her. Perhaps he did. Anyhow, she never had loved him, and before two years were over she eloped with your uncle,' and he went on to tell Wilfrid how that difference, which he had once before spoken to him of, between the latter and himself, had been on account of his uncle's conduct throughout this matter. 'He

was over-refined and sentimental, poor fellow ! He first refused to interfere with what he considered a good match for the girl, who trusted and believed in him implicitly, and then, after she had married against her better judgment, persuaded her to go off with him. It pained me terribly. And they both died soon after, utterly miserable. But it's an old story. I must be off. I advise you to go down to Twickenham as soon as you can find time.'

'I shall go to-morrow,' replied the other, and the next day he found himself enquiring the way to 7 Ferry Cross Terrace, from the Twickenham station.

As he rang at the bell of a narrow, red brick, semi-detached villa, not far from the river, Wilfrid could not help wondering why a wealthy young member of Parliament, fond of society, should have chosen such dreary winter quarters. Parliament had been prorogued till the 14th of December, and any member who had any powers of speaking, and many who had very small powers indeed, were improving the opportunity offered by the general uneasiness and depression felt as to the prospects and management of the war, to denounce or defend the Government to constituents who were everywhere eager to listen and applaud. The *Times* was daily exposing the shortcomings of various branches of army organization, and the lamentable state of things in general, while the nation listened with sorrowful anxiety. Why then had Walter Chessington failed,—and Ethel had written to her brother that he had done so,—why had he failed to meet his constituents as other members of the legislature were doing ? Why, instead of being at Lidfield, had he retired with his wife

to the quietest part of one of the quietest suburbs of London? Unless, indeed, —.

He was not long kept waiting for an answer to satisfy his curiosity. His friends, who received him very kindly, were evidently very glad to see him, but it was soon made clear to him that it was not merely for the pleasure of his society that they had invited him to come down. Little by little, hints were dropped, and suggestions given, and at last Wilfrid was told plainly the reason why Mr. and Mrs. Chessington had taken up their residence at Twickenham.

‘We have been fighting a series of battles at Otterstone, Mr. Oakburne,’ began the lady, with a glance at her husband.

‘Yes, Oakburne,’ said the other nervously. ‘We have been at war on this matter of Hoffbauer’s claims with regard to which I wrote to you. The house has been divided into two camps, and, as my wife tells you, there have been a series of battles. There was one terrible engagement.’

‘A regular Inkermann, wasn’t it, Walter?’

‘Yes, as Beatrice says, a regular Inkermann! with plenty of killed and wounded on both sides, and rather a doubtful result. And after that it seemed good to Cæsar to lead the army into winter quarters at Twickenham.’

‘Yes; but we were victorious. We had our own way: you know we had Walter,’ cries the army triumphantly, and with a decision that made Oakburne wonder whether the army did not lead Cæsar sometimes, when that general felt undecided as to his manœuvres. ‘We have won the battle, and done what we think right. But it has worried him terribly, poor dear fellow,—much more

than it has me. Tell him all about it, Walter.' And then Chessington told his friend what had occurred.

Walter Chessington, who had imagined that he was pretty well acquainted with his mother's disposition, had been astonished, and almost dismayed, by the unexpected show of spirit that lady Adela displayed on being informed of his intentions to surrender the Otterstone property. Naturally the best tempered and most easy going of women, and the fondest and most indulgent of mothers, the idea of her son making over his rights to Sybil Beechcroft, roused in her a display of angry energy that fairly startled her family. At Otterstone she had spent the happiest part of her life, there had been born to her the children whose growth she had so tenderly watched, there the husband she so loved had died. The inhabitants of the village, many of whom she had befriended in their troubles, the numerous families in the county with whom she had been on more or less intimate terms of friendship all her life, and the little round of quiet social duties which bound her to each, had all grown to form part of her existence. To be severed from this life of hers, and from these dear familiar scenes, would be a blow which would kill her. A blow which it would be a wicked, cruel act to deal. So she told her son most frankly, with bitter tears and passionate upbraidings. Had he no thought for her or for his sister? The latter felt all this in her way equally strongly, for Catherine's deepest affections were, as has been said, centered in her home and home-life; but, keen as was the pang, and bitter as were the tears that she shed on hearing Walter's resolve, her nature was scarcely capable of feeling the anger that it roused in her mother, and, in her heart of hearts, she believed that her brother was

acting rightly, a conviction which, though it did not lessen her personal sorrow, made her slow to blame him. Lady Adela, however, could not, or would not, see any right in the matter, and after denouncing his project as unjust, insane, and wickedly selfish, and administering a lecture to Walter and his wife, that took them both entirely by surprise, she wrote off to her brother and chief counsellor, Lord Ashleigh, to come at once to her aid, and help her 'to save her poor misguided boy from ruining them all.'

Lord Ashleigh, who had of course left Homburg by this time and was recruiting himself in Paris before returning to his ancestral property, lost no time in obeying her summons, and it may be imagined that, if Mr. and Mrs. Walter Chessington had heard their cause abused by their mother, they had to listen to far more bitter diatribes against it from their uncle. Reasoning, sarcasm, and even at last vituperation, every possible means that could be brought to bear, in order to change the resolve of this foolish young couple, was in turn made use of by that shrewd advocate. Walter had his property under a perfectly sound legal title, Lord Ashleigh maintained, and if anyone was rash enough to try and upset it the onus of proof lay on him. As for the documents he didn't believe in half of them—in any of them. They were probably, nay undoubtedly they must be all forgeries. And then! who was this grand sacrifice to benefit? 'Why! bless my soul! a young heiress! a girl who has more than she knows what to do with, by Jove! And you want to turn your poor dear mother and sister, and your young wife,—rebellious little monkey that she is!—and your future family too, yes, you must remember that, Walter!—you want, I say, to turn them all out of

the home they've lived in all their lives, to subject them to want and misery, not for any poor starving wretch,—there'd be some meaning in that!—but for the sake of a young single woman rolling in wealth! I tell you it's iniquitous! monstrous! Not to be thought of for an instant!

When Walter still remained unmoved by such speeches, Lord Ashleigh, in real alarm, called in Mr. Elkfield as an ally, and begged him to try and use his influence over his daughter and son-in-law, to dissuade them from their 'madness.' All the efforts of the latter, however, as well as those which his wife made at his command, proved equally unavailing. Walter, still as politely obstinate as ever, and beginning to get a little wroth with his antagonists, one day announced that he was going to put himself into communication with Mr. Throckmorton, and then what Beatrice called the 'battle of Inkerman' had taken place.

'As the young madman,' said Mr. Elkfield, the morning after Walter had stated this intention, 'as the young madman,—I beg your pardon, Lady Adela, but it is acting like a madman,—as he insists on doing this, the only way I can see is to stop the pocket money. He can't touch my daughter's money because of the settlements, d'ye see, and if his lordship here and me both give him to understand that he won't get a penny from either of us, he'll have less than a beggarly three hundred a year, because all the rest is drawn from the Otterstone property, which he can't touch, according to his notions. Once make them see that clearly, and we'll soon bring them on their knees! eh, Lady Adela? As for Beatrice, she was always saucy and wilful from a child!'

Lady Adela and her brother both owned that the idea

was a good one, and it was agreed that Lord Ashleigh should tell Walter of the decision they had come to without delay, 'for,' said Mr. Elkfield, 'he doesn't look to me with as much regard as he ought ; but he has always thought a deal of his lordship's opinion.'

'We were on the terrace one morning together,' said Walter when my uncle expressed a hope that I had "changed my mind about this business of Hoffbauer's."

'I have not changed it in the smallest degree,' said I. 'I thought I had told you yesterday, that I am going to write to Mr. Throckmorton.'

'Then my uncle "let me have it," as they say in racing lingo. He dwelt for the hundredth time on the sentimental side of the thing, "giving up the the old place," "tearing away your mother and sister from their old home," "the cowardice of surrender" and so on ; all of which considerations I need hardly say, have caused me a very great deal of pain and anxiety. I told him so plainly, and that I felt them quite as much, if not more than anyone, but that I considered my duty, my sense of honour, paramount to everything else. "I feel bound," I said, "to surrender to its rightful owners what has never belonged to me." That made him very angry. "Very well, Walter," said he, "it is my duty to tell you in that case that you can expect no help from me or from your father-in-law. He has begged me to tell you so. You will have to maintain your wife and family on the beggarly pittance which belongs to you after surrendering this place,—you know well enough what it is ! If you choose to starve on that, and to make your mother and sister starve with you, it is your own look out. I will be no party to it, and you must take the consequence of your wicked folly."'

‘I told him I was fully prepared to do so, and then his wrath fairly boiled over. “You are an obstinate, sentimental, young fool, Walter,” he was pleased to say. “I have been thinking, and working, and saving money for you, boy this last ten years ! And this is my reward. So be it ! You choose to dishonour your name, and surrender your ancestral rights for a scruple that even a school girl would be ashamed of confessing, to her bosom friend ; you, by Jove ! who have brains, and a good head-piece of your own ! Let it be so. It severs the connection between us. I shall fight this matter to the last penny for your poor mother’s sake, and, what is more, I shall win and make you ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Henceforth you may sink or swim as you please. You know how I have denied myself for you, but now every penny I can save, will go to your cousin Vere Cutlerham, who will inherit the title ! Expect not a farthing from me.”’

‘Then Walter told him that the money ought certainly to go with the title, and that he was pleased to think that both would pass to one whom Lord Ashleigh so much esteemed,’ interposed Beatrice. ‘You know his uncle always hated all the Cutlerhams, and never liked Lady Cutlerham, his sister. He used always to call Vere, the son, “that horrid little cad.” Imagine how angry he must have been to say that, Mr. Oakburne ! You know he has always been very fond of Walter.’

‘I said something to that effect,’ went on Chessington, ‘and I told him that he need not fear I should ever trouble him. Then,—for I too had worked myself into a great rage,—I added that I would no longer consent to be lectured by him, and that it was my intention at once to leave Otterstone ; that he and the others might remain if

they pleased, but that I would stop no longer under the roof that did not belong to me. My poor uncle was very much moved. I must do him the justice to say that he has always been most generous and kind to me. But we were both in a rage, that's the truth. I had never seriously thought of going before, but, on consideration, I thought it was the best thing to do. There was another scene, a tremendous one, in which my mother,—both our mothers,—took part, and my uncle Giles and Mr. Elkfield came in to back them up. You can imagine the tears and objurgations! However, it ended in our sticking to our plan and here we are. I am no longer owner of Otterstone, but only a briefless barrister with very little to live on.'

Poor Walter gave a great sigh, and went and gazed from the window at the other end of the room, on the dreary little street where the lamps just lighted glimmered through the fog, and on the grey strip of river which was just visible beyond the dark meadow at the corner. No doubt his thoughts were in keeping with the melancholy prospect.

'You can think what a trial it has been to him,' said Beatrice, in a low tone, to Oakburne, sitting by the fire. 'Think of all he has had to give up. He has resigned his seat. Yes. Of course he has. Why, you know we have only three hundred a year to live upon, and are working for our bread. I don't think many men would do that,' she whispered, her bright eyes moist, and glittering in the firelight. 'I ought not to boast, but I don't believe there are many men who would do what my husband has done.'

'Not one in a hundred,' answered Oakburne, fervently, and indeed he believed it, and felt a great admiration and

fresh liking for his friend. 'Not one in a thousand,' he repeated. At any rate, it was clear that Walter had a willing coadjutor, and that the pair were, in that way, happy on account of their somewhat quixotic self-sacrifice. It was plain that misfortune had drawn them much closer together, and Wilfrid felt glad to think it was so. 'And what view does Miss Chessington take?' he asked.

'Poor Catherine! she has a very sad trial to bear,' said Beatrice. 'My sister-in-law believes that Walter is right, and yet, of course, she is passionately devoted to the dear old place, and naturally cannot think of leaving poor Lady Adela. So there she is cut off from us. We are in exile, Walter and I. You are really the first creature we have seen for the last week in the shape of a friend. None of our relations, as you can suppose, come near us. 'We are put in the corner like naughty children!' and she laughed merrily at the idea. It was plain that Mrs. Chessington was by no means overwhelmed with sorrow at the situation.

'Yes! and we shall have to eat our Christmas dinners in cornerland, like Horner of classical memory,' says Walter, coming back to the fireplace with a rueful smile. Wilfrid could see how pained and worried he had been by all that had occurred, and heartily sympathised with him. 'You must come and help us to get through the feast if you are in London, Oakburne,' he continued. 'And what is more, you must stay and dine now, and tell us all about what Throckmorton said.'

Wilfrid gladly consented, and then proceeded to tell them of his interview with Mr. Simcox, and how the latter had discovered the old parish register in Rolhill Church, a circumstance which naturally interested them a good deal, though, so far as Chessington was concerned,

the knowledge had ceased to be important. Then, having talked over Mr. Throckmorton's advice, and arranged that Walter should call on him, they fell to discussing the latter's plans for gaining a livelihood. He did not expect to get many briefs at first, and had been trying his hand at literature. Beatrice felt sure that her husband would make a great deal by his pen, by his literary talents. Mr. Oakburne knew a good many literary people, she was sure! Could he help them? And Wilfrid, mindful of Beverley Chipps and Throckmorton, said he thought he could, and promised at all events to do his best. Then they found themselves unconsciously gliding into talk about Otterstone, and reminiscences of the happy time they had spent in the autumn. How Fowler was now engaged to Miss Walzingmore; how Mr. Sprott had made a very sensible speech in the House against the Government; and how Lady Cynthia Rowancourt had taken quite a fancy to Wilfrid, which, really, if she was younger, would be, etc., etc., etc. They recalled the sport, the rides, the picnics, and the various incidents of that pleasant period, till some chance allusion reminded them that a time must soon come when they would no more care to dwell on these recollections, and a chill silence fell upon the trio that seemed to rob the bright fire of half its cheerfulness.

'Dear old place! It's hard to think of!' said Walter, and for a moment the tears rose unbidden in his eyes, as he thought of all that he was renouncing.

'The greater the sorrow, the greater the glory of the sacrifice!' said his wife, laying a hand on his. And then she turned the conversation to Lidfield and its gossip,

till Oakburne, finding it was time to return to London, bid his friends a hearty farewell, feeling that he liked them both better than he had ever done before.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Meeting that was not all a merry one.

Men must die—one dies by day, and near him moans his mother,
They dig his grave, tread it down, and go from it full loth :
And one dies about the midnight, and the wind moans, and no other,
And the snow gives him a burial—and God loves them both.

—JEAN INGELow.

A Lady with a Lamp shall stand,
In the great history of the land,
A noble type of good,
Heroic womanhood.

Nor even shall be wanting here
The palm, the lily, and the spear,
The symbols that of yore
Saint Filomena bore.

—LONGFELLOW.



It was the middle of November, before the ship that bore Major Cope and his fellow sufferers, reached Scutari. Those who survived the horrors of that voyage never afterwards recalled them, without a shudder, though,—to England's shame be it recorded,—they were horrors which nearly all wounded soldiers who were conveyed from the port of Balaklava to the Bosphorus had to endure. While the officers, in virtue of their rank, got slightly better accommodation, the men with

maimed limbs and fresh gaping wounds, were packed side by side on or between the decks, without beds, and in some cases, without even a blanket beneath them. Three or four overworked surgeons, strove to carry out the herculean task of tending some three hundred helpless sick, endeavouring to make up by unceasing labour for their own inadequate numbers, and the absence of proper supplies of medicine; while eight or ten invalided soldiers, quite unequal to their duties, but assisted in every possible way, by the officers, crew, and passengers, of the ship, administered to these victims of war and official mismanagement, the salt meat which formed the sailors rations,—the only food available,—together with such scanty supply of water as could be procured. Cope and those with him were, indeed, more fortunate than the wounded transported on board the 'Mauritius,' which was despatched from Balaklava Harbour, almost wholly unprovided with stores, who would have died from neglect had it not been for an invalided colonel, the sailors of the ship, and some soldiers' wives. But though it kept those who could eat it from starving, a diet of salt meat, ship's biscuit, and insufficient water is not calculated to improve the health of those who are at death's door. One poor fellow succumbed to his miseries, some five days after they had left the Russian coast, and Major Cope suffered so severely from similar causes that, when the vessel anchored in the Bosphorus on the tenth day of their voyage, he felt that had it continued two days longer he must have shared a similar fate.

The day was clear, fine, and still. The light of the early morning sun shone full upon the splendours of the fair city of Constantine, and the tabled summits of the mountains beyond. As Cope gazed on the hills and

the cypress groves, on the spires, domes, towers, and battlemented walls washed by the blue waters, all brightened and gilded by that glorious light, a sudden pang of sorrow mingled with his keen joy,—a warning thought that he and many of those with him would not long be able to rejoice in God's fair earth and sky.

It was not, however, Stamboul, with its wealth of historical associations, but the less renowned suburb of Scutari opposite to it on the Asiatic coast which was the destination of Cope and his companions, and the 'golden city,' in which the Persians established their treasures when they attempted the conquest of Greece, is better known to Englishmen through its hospitals and cemeteries than its palaces, gardens, and famous marts and bazaars. The morning wore on, and still no boats appeared to transport the shipload of wounded men to the shore. Noon gave place to afternoon, and afternoon to evening, but still they did not arrive, till at length a message came from the shore to explain that all that were available had been appropriated to the shipment of troops for the Crimea. There was nothing for the unfortunate sufferers but to wait patiently, and thus, anchored within a quarter of a mile of the landing place, they were able to contemplate at their leisure the beauties of the scene, and the huge block of buildings forming the Barrack Hospital, which stood on the cliffs opposite, and which was to be the destination of many of them. To one at least, however, the delay proved fatal. During the day a chill wind sprung up which brought back an attack of the fever from which Major Cope had been suffering, and the night found him in a high state of delirium. The patient was not much better next morning, and he was scarcely conscious when at length the wished-for boats

came alongside, and conveyed him and his companions in misfortune, by batches, to the wretched pier, which served as a place of debarkation. There they found the hospital attendants awaiting them. Such as could not walk, among whom of course was poor Cope, were placed on mattresses; those who could, followed as they were best able, the stronger helping their weaker comrades, and the sad procession of maimed, bruised, and bandaged men, some stricken unto death, wound its way slowly up the steep, a Roman Catholic priest walking among them to offer his consolations to such as belonged to his church.

Five hospitals had at this time been assigned to the British troops;—the General Hospital, two floating Hospitals, the Naval Hospital, and the Barrack Hospital. The latter of these, which was by far the most extensive,—being, as the name implies, a portion of the barracks,—was a large building enclosing a square court. Each floor consisted of a corridor, with doors at intervals opening into large wards, the sick and wounded private soldiers being placed in rows along the corridors, while for the officers, accommodation was provided in some of the wards, others of which were fitted up as dispensaries, store rooms, and the like. A tower at one end of the hospital had been assigned to Miss Nightingale and her sister nurses. Of the apartments in this building some were set aside for sleeping and eating purposes, and one large one was used as a kitchen and store room, while another was devoted to the meetings presided over by Miss Nightingale, at which measures were arranged for providing for the daily wants of the various hospitals. From this head-quarters did the little band of devoted women, to which Sybil Beechcroft had attached herself,

organise all those beneficent schemes by which the condition of their poor suffering charges was alleviated. Here were received those gifts which the generosity of the British nation sent forth so lavishly to aid its wounded soldiers, and hence were dispensed the medicines and comforts for the sick, and the articles of clothing of which the feeble, gaunt, ragged, half-starved men consigned to their care, arrived so deplorably destitute. Here did they devise how best to overcome the thousand obstacles which official blundering and routine had opposed in the way of any decent treatment of our wounded. Here, aided by Mr. Osborne, by Mr. Stafford, by Mr. Macdonald, the almoner of *The Times* fund, and a few other gentlemen who had devoted themselves to the good work, did they plan their campaign against misery, disease, and death; sending hence to the government and friends at home those letters,—the despatches of this little army of Good Samaritans,—which told the people of Great Britain how deplorable was the condition of that portion of their troops who had been struck down while fighting their battles, and which roused in response such a wonderful outpouring of sympathy and practical benevolence. In later times we have grown used to the spectacle of charity working side by side with fire and slaughter, but in those days it was new to us,—the dawn of a fresh era in the long history of human warfare. Surely it is among the most signal of England's glories, and one of the most striking of the fruits of Christianity, that such a General and staff should thus, scarce noticed by the world, have been fighting against the evils of war on the shores of the Bosphorus, while those other armies on which the eyes of Europe were

fixed, were doing their work of destruction on the Crimean heights. ;

It was to the Barrack Hospital that Major Cope was conveyed, wracked with pain from wounds which the voyage had aggravated, burning with fever, and scarcely conscious. He did not heed the lanes of wounded men through which he was carried, the moans of suffering, the distorted countenances of some, the dull, fixed, hopeless expression on the pale faces of others. He did not note the doctors and the sisterhood of nurses passing from bed to bed, and doing their work of mercy. He was all unconscious, like the great part of that assemblage of wounded and dying men, of the lady who, in the silence of the night, passed, lamp in hand, from corridor to corridor and from ward to ward, through those two-and-a-half miles of stricken, helpless humanity, noting what duties had been left undone, where comforts had been neglected to be given, or remedies had been left untried, —Miss Florence Nightingale thus fitly ending her day of ceaseless labours.

To all such things as these poor Cope was oblivious as, with frequent paroxysms of delirium, he lay for two days on his rough couch conscious of nought but pain. Then, on the morning of the third day, the fever suddenly abated, and he awoke to find Sybil Beechcroft standing by his bedside.

His illness had left him so prostrate that his mind had scarcely power to wonder at anything. He half thought he must be dreaming as he watched the woman whom he had loved so well, and whom but a few months back he had asked for a second time to be his wife. Where could he be? What was he doing here? In a faint voice of surprise he uttered her name, as he mechanically took

the cup she offered him. He saw her smile a tearful look of recognition, and knew that she said, 'you will soon be better now.' He tried to answer, to ask an explanation, but his strength failed him. He sank back and again became unconscious. When he next came to himself he felt wonderfully clearer and more at ease, but he knew quite surely that he was dying. He lay quiet for a time full of sad and solemn thoughts, but still with the idea of the unaccountable fact of Sybil Beechcroft's presence there uppermost in his mind, till at last he was aroused by becoming aware that the doctor, who was feeling his pulse, was scrutinising him keenly with a look of pity in his eyes, of which he at once read the meaning.

'Doctor,' asked he in a voice now reduced to a whisper. 'Tell me, have I any chance?'

The doctor shook his head sadly, and Cope was for a moment silenced by the awful announcement, as a thousand remembrances of the past mingled with that indescribable fear of death which the bravest must experience. Then he managed to gather strength again to ask to be allowed to speak to Miss Beechcroft.

'Miss Beechcroft!' answered the doctor in some surprise. 'Oh yes! certainly! I will tell her.' He gave him a draught of some cordial, and then rose and went hurriedly to fetch her. Doctors and nurses had never much time to spare in the Scutari Hospitals.

The noonday sun was streaming into the room, and he lay dreamily watching the light that fell on the stone arch of the doorway, and the changing tints that it painted on the rough blocks, discoloured by damp and time. There was a low murmur of sound throughout the room. Such as had the heart and the strength were chatting to each other, some were reading, others like himself were

lying motionless lazily watching and listening, while doctors and nurses engaged over their work were passing and repassing. He began to realise where he was, and to notice the prostrate forms on either side of him. He tried to raise himself and look around, but the effort brought on such a spasm of pain that he sank back groaning and dizzy ; and then the awful feeling came over him that he should never have strength to rise again. For a time he lay quite overcome, but gradually his faculties became clearer, and he was able to determine with himself what he wanted to say to Sybil Beechcroft. As he was thus meditating, his mind full the while of such thoughts as rise in a dying man's heart, some half dozen orderlies passed through the room bearing something on a stretcher. It was a burial party, but none seemed to heed it. Two sick men at the further end of the ward went on with their conversation without in the least noticing it, though it brushed past close to them, and a sister, who was reading to another patient not far off, and who had to shift her place slightly, scarcely interrupted herself, and resumed in an unaltered tone immediately. The incident was so common throughout the day that it excited scarce any attention. It was, however, the first time that Cope had seen it, and a sigh of hopeless grief escaped him as he turned his face to the pillow. In a short time a well known voice aroused him, and he saw that Miss Beechcroft had come and was sitting beside him.

She said a few words of kindly greeting with a great but perceptible effort to control her agitation, and then tried to cheer him by telling him how it was that she had come there, and all that was being done in the hospitals and at home for the cause of the wounded.

‘You will soon get well and strong again now,’ she repeated.

Cope shook his head. ‘The doctor has told me,’ said he. His voice was so low that she had to bend down to catch the words. ‘I know now,’ he continued, ‘and I felt it directly when I first came to myself. I want to say goodbye, Sybil, as we have known each other so well.’

‘No, no ! not goodbye !’ she replied, with tears in her eyes.

‘Yes, it is so, Sybil. The doctor has told me, and I know it. I wanted to tell you,’ he resumed, after a painful pause. ‘I wanted to tell you one thing before I die. Poor Reginald Oakburne is in the Crimea. I met him, dear old fellow ! You know what friends we have been ! Sybil, I know he loves you still, and that you used to care for him before they made mischief between you in India. Promise me to forgive him.’

Poor Sybil was too startled, and too deeply moved to reply, save by a pressure of the hand.

‘You will, I know. Don’t believe what they told you. It was all untrue. I never had a better friend,—and you don’t know how true he has been to you. I can’t say more now,’ and his breathing became painfully laboured. ‘Bid him goodbye for me—and, send this, please, this watch to them at home, to my mother, and my other things. . . . God bless you, Sybil !’ and he sank back utterly exhausted, while Sybil, no longer able to control her tears, whispered that she would do all he wished. He gave a sigh of relief and closed his eyes. The effort to speak had exhausted the little strength that remained to him. In a few moments he became unconscious, and when the doctor shortly after returned to him he was dead,

‘I thought he would have lasted till this evening,’ said the latter coolly, half to himself ; he had naturally grown somewhat callous to the sight of death. Then his glance fell on poor Sybil, sitting half stupified by the dead man’s bed, and the sight of her grief stirred a pity in him which that of the poor lifeless form before him had failed to awaken. He saw at once that she had known this dead officer in old times. ‘Miss Beechcroft,’ said he, kindly, ‘You had better come away and rest a little. You are overtaxing your strength, and we can’t afford to let you do that,’ and he led her to the room to which the sisters used to retire for rest and refreshment.

That afternoon the remains of poor Major Cope were borne to the cemetery where the British officers who fell in the Crimea are laid in resting-places more pleasing to the fancy of the fastidious than those of the nameless rank and file who lie buried together in large graves not far from the hospitals, or of such as with still less ceremony were cast into huge pits on the field of battle.

Miss Beechcroft’s strength had already been impaired by the unwonted strain upon it, but hitherto she had borne up bravely enough, scarce conscious of the severe tax on her powers. Though, as was natural, more than one of the little band of sisters had begun to show signs of undermined health, she had still managed hitherto to perform her duties with, outwardly, unimpaired zeal and efficiency. The shock of her meeting with Major Cope, and the pain of witnessing his death, combined with the tidings he had given her respecting his friend, now began however, to tell seriously upon her health. Ever since they parted, she had not ceased to blame herself for her conduct to Reginald

Oakburne, and had secretly longed to see him and ask his forgiveness; and now she knew that any ship might bring him wounded to the pier on the shore below, perhaps but to die as his friend had died within these very walls. Might he not be here even now in one of the other hospitals? Or, saddest thought of all, might he not be lying buried on the Crimean heights, or here in Scutari, and she know nothing of it? Every fresh arrival of wounded men filled her with dread, and as she did her work in the hospitals a vague fear was ever at her heart, lest she should suddenly come on that well remembered face, perhaps distorted with pain, perhaps unconscious, perhaps borne by her with its eyes closed in death. Longing for news, and yet dreading it, she felt that her duties were her only solace, and devoted herself more earnestly to them than ever; but let her work as hard as she would, she could not banish the thoughts that haunted her. Day by day her cheek grew paler and thinner, her step less elastic, her spirits more depressed, till her fellow nurses and the doctors began to glance at her with secret pity, and whisper to each other that Miss Beechcroft would be the next to give way. But Sybil had a high spirit, and resolved that she would never give way. It was as well, after all, to die here,—doing her duty, feeling that she was doing good,—as anywhere else. She persevered doggedly in spite of the kindly remonstrances of those around her, and got daily weaker and less fitted for her task, till one morning, towards the middle of December, a letter reached her from Mr. Throckmorton, telling her of her claims to the Otterstone property, and that she ought either to come home as soon as she felt at liberty to do so, or at least

tell him what course she would like him to take in the matter.

Everyone was now beginning, as usual, to look forward to the approach of Christmas, but that season of peace and goodwill promised to bring no change in the attitude of the belligerents in the Crimea, where things had been going from bad to worse. The terrible hurricane of the 14th November had wrought ruin and confusion throughout the camps and the fleets of the allies, wrecking vessels, overturning tents, unroofing huts, and scattering their contents to the winds. After the battle of Inkermann hostilities were confined to mere encounters of outposts, and by the latter end of November the siege had been practically suspended. Correspondents reported that the army was without rest, shelter, or warm clothing. Rain fell unceasingly till the trenches resembled canals, water a foot deep stood in the tents, and the camp was a sea of mud. Food became scarce, the roads impassable, and the confusion and horrors in the town of Balaklava,—where stores of food for men, and fodder for horses, lay rotting in the mud because they could not be taken to the camp,—increased daily. The few horses that remained available for service were feeble and covered with sores; the ambulance waggons had nearly all broken down; among the 12,000 effective British troops there was by the middle of December scarcely one sound garment; and fever, dysentry, and diarrhoea, were rife throughout the camp. Such were the tidings which Sybil and her companions at Scutari heard week after week, while the number of wounded and sick continued to increase alarmingly. By the end of January there were 5000 at the camp, and 6000 at Scutari, at which shiploads continued to arrive weekly

till the hospitals were crowded to the very doors and preparations had to be made for fitting up the cavalry stables near the Barrack Hospital, and the open space in the Square, to furnish additional accommodation. The work therefore to which she had fled as a distraction from her sorrows was supplied to Miss Beechcroft in abundance, but the gloomy atmosphere of the hospitals was scarcely calculated to act beneficially on either her mind or body. On the morning when Mr. Throckmorton's communication reached her she had, during the early part of the day, felt very faint and depressed, and it was while she was taking a few moments rest that the letter was given to her. Her first feeling as she perused it was one of utter bewilderment and dismay. No idea of becoming the possessor of Otterstone had ever entered her brain. She might indeed as a child have heard her father and mother talking of their claim to the property, but she had always been given to understand that they had long since relinquished all idea of pressing it. The thought of suddenly becoming the owner of a large estate, with its manifold responsibilities, frightened her. She had quite sufficient for her needs, too much indeed, already. What good could this additional wealth be to her? All that she wanted just now was rest, that this weary problem of life should be solved for ever. She felt peevishly angry with Mr. Throckmorton for having thrust this additional burden upon her. He had a hobby, she knew, about Otterstone, which she had heard her father even,—who, of course, might have been excused for strong feeling on the subject,—laugh at, and chaff him about. Why could not Mr. Throckmorton leave her in peace? She found herself altogether so upset by the news, and so ill, that she resolved to walk out for a

little. The day was tolerably fine, and she determined that she would walk up to the cemetery, which was but a short distance from the hospital. The burial parties did not begin their melancholy duties till the afternoon. The place was quiet, and was on the heights above the sea; the air and the fine view would do her good, and she would also have an opportunity, as she had often wished, of visiting Major Cope's grave. So she set off, trying on the way to make up her mind as to how she should answer Mr. Throckmorton's proposals.

She felt horribly perplexed. To go home now would be like flying from duty, and she had made up her mind not to give in. On the other hand, what could she say to Mr. Throckmorton? It seemed very hard to take this property from the Chessingtons, who had had it all their lives, and to give it to her, who did not in the least desire it. Though she had never known them personally, she had always heard that Lady Adela,—who had been in former days a friend of her aunt, Lady Felsparley's,—and Miss Chessington, were very popular in the county, and had the reputation of being very kind to the poor in their neighbourhood; and she knew that Walter Chessington had lately married. She remembered how, when quite a girl, barely sixteen, she had met the latter, then not quite of age, at a large archery meeting; how he had begun to talk to her, and that she had liked him; and that then her father had suddenly come up and said, very angrily, 'you must not speak to that man.' Then he had told her afterwards that their family had been deeply wronged by the Chessingtons, which had naturally made her rather indignant, and quite satisfied to obey his command in the matter. Ah! if he were only alive to help and advise her! How different all would be then. He

would have been overjoyed at this news; but to her, what was it? What ought she to do? What would her father have wished her to do?

She had reached the Cemetery, and walking to the extreme verge of the cliff, looked down on to the deep waters of the Bosphorus. Oh for some friend to counsel her! A friend! Poor Major Cope! he had been a true friend to her. Her heart smote her that she had not before come to visit his last resting-place, and she turned and sought among the recent graves till she found the tablet that bore his name. Her eyes filled with tears as she recalled his generosity, his chivalrous devotion to her, and his sad fate. To die thus, after a lingering illness, from wounds and disease, and to be buried in a foreign land far from his home, and those nearest and dearest to him, it was a sad lot! How forbearing and generous he had been with her! She felt she had never realized till now how good he had been. She felt utterly lonely and helpless, and, going a little way from the grave, she sat down, and, hiding her face in her hands, gave way to a passion of tears. The breeze rustled through the tall, graceful, cypress trees that half darkened with their black shadows the green graves on which the changing sunlight fell, the sea below was dashing in little waves on the beach, and opposite to her lay the beautiful city of Stamboul; but Sybil sat there weeping, with bowed head, heedless of the beauty around her, ill, heart-broken, and weary of her life.

She may have remained thus some five minutes when, glancing around, she was startled to see a man standing by the grave she had just left. He was evidently engrossed in his own thoughts, and had not seen her, but something in his half-averted face and figure caused

Miss Beechcroft to start to her feet with a strange feeling of mingled hope and anxiety. As she did so, the man turned, and for the first time perceived her. With a sudden exclamation of surprise he strode hurriedly towards her. His pale, thin face was half hidden by a bushy black beard, his tall figure, though still retaining the upright military carriage, was gaunt and wasted ; but, in spite of the changes wrought by time, trial, and illness, she recognized him at once.

‘Reginald!’ she cried, turning to him with outstretched hands. ‘Thank God ! Then, you are still alive !’

‘Sybil ! Miss Beechcroft !’ he exclaimed, in a husky voice. ‘Is it really you ! How, in the name of Heaven, came you here ?’ and he grasped the little hands extended to him, and stood gazing at her with delight and astonishment in his eyes. ‘Sybil, I thought we should never meet again !’

‘Yes !’ answered Miss Beechcroft, rather inconsequently, with a blush overspreading her pale face. ‘I am glad to see you again, alive and well, Mr. Oakburne !’ and she suddenly drew back.

‘All is so terribly uncertain here for—for us now. I—I came here because it is quiet, and I wanted to see his grave,’ she continued in a faltering voice, pointing to the wooden tablet beneath the cypress tree, by which Oakburne had been standing.

‘You knew he was buried here, then ?’ cried Oakburne, with a quick glance.

‘I was with him when he died,’ replied she, sadly. ‘He died in the Hospital where I am helping to nurse the wounded.’

‘Sybil !’ cried her lover, the momentary cloud which had passed over his face, changing to a look of fond

admiration. 'Are you one of those who are with Miss Nightingale, then?'

'Yes,' answered she gravely. 'That is how I came to be with him then. He spoke of you very affectionately, and told me where you were. Almost his last words were to ask me to bid you goodbye from him, poor fellow!'

'God forgive me! I had forgotten him for the moment,' cried he with deep emotion. 'He was my best and dearest friend, God bless him! But Sybil, do not think me unfeeling because I thus seem to forget. He had told me of you, had given me, I hardly know why, new hope. I have never ceased to think of you since we parted in India so miserably!—I have tried but I never could! I have been wounded and ill too. There was a time when I thought I should never recover—but, I have never forgotten. And now when I meet you thus, after all these years,—how can I help it? I can't think of anything else till I know if you can forgive me. Sybil, can you forgive me?'

'Forgive you!' cried Sybil with a sob. 'It's you to forgive!' and the next moment she was weeping on his breast.

It was with very solemn feelings that this pair of reconciled lovers stood awhile by the grave of the dear friend, with whom they had been so much associated during their whole intercourse, and to whom Heaven had allotted a fate apparently so hard when contrasted with their own; and then, full of tender, regretful remembrances of him that chastened their joy at being thus re-united, they returned slowly to the town.

Each had of course much to tell the other. Sybil had to explain how she had been led to join Miss Nightingale;

Oakburne, to tell how a week after Inkermann he had received a bad wound in the shoulder while on duty in the trenches which had sent him to the hospital, and how, while he had been there, the hurricane had taken place which destroyed the marquees set apart for the wounded, causing him to suffer so severely from the cold and exposure that he had been sent on to the General Hospital at Scutari. Here he soon recovered sufficiently to get out and hire quarters for himself, and, feeling that his best chance of recovery was at home, he had managed to get a certificate from a medical board enabling him to obtain leave of absence to England, whither, not knowing that Sybil was so near to him, he had, since his meeting with Cope, secretly had other motives for wishing to return. Then he had by chance heard of Cope's death, and thus been led to visit the Cemetery. He had intended leaving for England in three days time, but now of course all his plans would depend on what Sybil was going to do.

Then Miss Beechcroft told her lover of the communication she had received from Mr. Throckmorton, and asked his advice. Major Oakburne's surprise may be imagined. That his future wife should prove to be the lawful owner of Otterstone, the property which had belonged to his own ancestors, naturally filled him with elation. It seemed as if the two highest points of his desire were to be reached at once and at the same time. To his eager mind therefore, there was no doubt that Sybil ought to return immediately, and do without hesitation whatever Mr. Throckmorton wished. His own leave of absence was but short. Why should they not be married as soon as possible here or in England and then return to the east together after having arranged


everything? Sebastopol could not hold out much longer, and perhaps they need not return at all; and pleasant visions rose in his mind of becoming the master of Otterstone Hall. Sybil, however, only agreed after a good deal of hesitation. She was, of course, her own mistress, and if she had chosen might have been married at Constantinople without any delay, but she shrank from leaving her work. The doctors, however, soon settled this objection by telling her that if she did not take a thorough rest now she would soon be laid up altogether, whereas a little repose at home might fit her to resume work in a short time. So it was agreed that Major Oakburne should go home as he had arranged, and that Sybil should follow a week later at the end of the month, when another of the nursing sisters was, like herself, returning to England in order to recruit her strength. As regarded the Otterstone Hall question, Miss Beechcroft wrote telling her friend and guardian, Mr. Throckmorton, to do what he considered necessary in the matter, and at the same time told him of her meeting with Major Oakburne and its results.

It will be seen therefore that the preparations for depriving Walter Chessington of his property were proceeding in a way which ought thoroughly to have satisfied that sensitive gentleman; and, on the other hand, his uncle, Lord Ashleigh, was leaving no stone unturned to defeat the projects of his opponents. How their respective plans prospered must be shown in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

Is penultimate and treats of the law's delays and other matters.

The human race are sons of sorrow born ;
And each must have his portion. Vulgar minds
Refuse, or crouch beneath their load ; the brave
Bear theirs without repining.—THOMSON.

HE case of *Beechcroft v. Chessington* was one which promised to be of considerable interest, both to the legal profession, and to the public. Many of the circumstances connected with it were of such an uncommon character, and the principal parties to the suit were of such good social standing, that when paragraphs on the subject got into the papers, people naturally began to talk about it. It was not till after the year had well commenced that matters were fairly set in train for commencing legal proceedings ; and when things had been actually started, they progressed uncommonly slowly.

Lord Ashleigh's counsel and solicitors were naturally anxious to proceed with as much deliberation as possible, and perhaps those engaged against him were equally averse to hurry. Certain it is that to the litigants the 'law's delays' seemed interminable, and that, as their wont is, they frequently expressed unfavourable opinions of their legal advisers. Major Oakburne especially, who

soon grew to imagine himself a party to the suit, and who had fondly believed that the whole thing was so clear and simple that it could be settled in a month at the outside, was loud in his denunciations of the dilatoriness and, as he was pleased to call it, 'humbugging' of those connected with the law.

Mr. Throckmorton and his fellow barristers, on the contrary, thought the case a very pretty one, and were anxious that there should be no foolish and unseemly precipitation in the matter. The former was naturally a very zealous partisan of the plaintiffs. He had so often heard his old friend, General Beechcroft, denounce James Chessington's conduct in former days, and had sympathised so strongly with him, that, having also acted professionally in his interests, he was extremely pleased that there seemed at last a fair prospect of restoring to his daughter the property of which her father had been deprived; and when at last the trial was fixed to take place at the next Assizes, to be held at Thornbury, he felt very jubilant at the prospects of victory. Doctor Oakburne, as has been said, by no means agreed with him on this point. It was perhaps equally natural that his sympathies should all be enlisted on behalf of Walter Chessington and his family, and though he acquiesced in the justice of Miss Beechcroft's claim, and admired his friend's conduct in determining to enforce it against himself, he could not help wishing that it might turn out somehow to be ill-founded, and that Lady Adela and her children might be spared the pain of leaving their old home. In holding this opinion, Wilfrid not only found himself at variance with Mr. Throckmorton, but, as time went on, with his own family. When his brother, Major Oakburne, returned from the Crimea, and his engage-

ment to Miss Beechcroft was publicly announced, both his mother and sister, no less than himself, felt excessively elated by the thought that he was about, by his marriage, to become the master of those broad lands of which Sir Francis Oakburne had been deprived more than two hundred and fifty years earlier. Mrs. Oakburne in particular was delighted at the idea. Even the recollections of Sir Rupert de Bolderwood himself, and of his gallant achievement at Rolhill fort, sank into insignificance for a time, as she recalled traditions of the ancient splendours of the Oakburnes,—for next to her own family she esteemed that of her deceased husband as one of the best in the land. She, therefore, and Ethel, and Major Oakburne, were very severe on Wilfrid when he attempted to argue the case from the Chessington point of view, and denounced his leanings as sentimental and unjust. His brother in particular spoke so warmly about his want of proper interest in the fortunes of his race, that their discussion closed somewhat abruptly, and Reginald the invalid,—who, of course, was made a good deal of as a wounded Crimean hero,—being somewhat irritable, Wilfrid afterwards was careful to keep his opinions to himself.

Lady Felsparley, it need hardly be said, was quite of Major Oakburne's opinion, and indeed far more eager in her feelings on the subject than her niece, who now began to experience constant twinges of conscience at the thought of ousting the Chessingtons from Otterstone. The former lady now made no difficulty with regard to Miss Beechcroft's matrimonial plans; first, because Major Oakburne, a winner of the Victoria Cross, who had been favourably mentioned in despatches, and was well spoken of in his profession as an able officer, was regarded by

her with some justice as a very different personage from the extravagant subaltern of Indian days, and also because her niece's prospective wealth made her a lady of sufficient importance to be on the best of terms with. So she made much of the couple, and especially of Sybil, and spoke with a great deal of virtuous indignation of the wickedness of James Chessington, Walter's grandfather.

Thus the lawyers consulted and argued, and the friends of the respective suitors grumbled and grew more and more impatient ; Ministers left the Cabinet, and others took their places ; the Czar died, and his son reigned in his stead ; diplomatists met at Vienna, consulted, differed, agreed, and parted again ; and still the war went on, and still the Otterstone will case remained undecided.

All this while Mr. and Mrs. Chessington were leading a life that was far from happy. Not only were they harassed by constant thoughts of the painful sacrifice they were making, but were also suffering still more keenly from the sorrow caused by the painful estrangement which their conduct had caused between themselves and their respective parents, not to mention Lord Ashleigh their uncle. The latter had won Miss Chessington over to think that Walter, though acting nobly, was mistaken, and persuaded her that in his interests, as well as in those of her mother, she must be made a party in the suit as being the person next entitled to the property after himself and his heirs. This, combined with the pain she felt at her separation from the brother to whom she was so attached, preyed upon her spirits to an extent that made her suffer so visibly as to make Lady Adela constantly inclined to pardon her son had not she had his uncle by her to check her imprudent tenderness.

As for the Elkfields, Beatrice's father,—who thoroughly agreed with Lord Ashleigh and felt a great deal of anger and contempt towards Walter for having, as he termed it, 'thrown all he had into the mud,'—very quickly controlled any tendency which Mrs. Elkfield may have felt to sympathise with her daughter, and took good care that she should hold no communication with 'those rebellious children.' His scheme for 'stopping the pocket money,' as he playfully called it, was most rigorously carried out, and as neither Walter nor his wife had hitherto had the slightest practice in the art of domestic economy, they found that to live on £300 a year was a task of considerable difficulty, and passed but a gloomy time during the dreary months preceding the hearing of the case.

The season, it will be remembered, was a trying one for the whole nation. The cold weather set in with extreme severity in January, and lasted well nigh till June; bread, potatoes, and all the necessaries of life, became alarmingly dear; everywhere the sufferings of the poor were very great, and the death rate increased terribly, till, at the end of the winter quarter, it exceeded the ordinary return by 20,000. In the midst of all this trouble at home, the news of the sufferings of the army before Sebastopol, and of the failure of its operations, as well as of those of our fleet in the Baltic, reached England. Men began to feel as if these accumulated calamities were a special judgment inflicted on them from Heaven, and seldom has any religious observance been so fully joined in as was the service on the day of Fasting and Humiliation, appointed by the Queen to be kept throughout the United Kingdom, in order to implore the mercy of the Almighty to avert the dangers that

seemed to be impending over the nation. It was during this troublous period that Walter Chessington's cares and sorrows were further augmented by the advent of a little daughter, who survived her birth but two days. It might have been hoped that this fresh trial to the young couple would have proved a means of reconciling them with their relations ; but though letters of condolence arrived from Lady Adela and Mrs. Elkfield, both the husband of the latter, and Lord Ashleigh, took care that they should contain no messages of forgiveness which should condone Walter's rebellion, and Chessington and his wife, stung by what they naturally perhaps considered as harsh treatment, stoutly declined to make any overtures of peace, and replied to them in the same spirit as the writers. This sad loss, however, won from Lady Adela one small concession, which was a great consolation to her son and daughter-in-law. Miss Chessington, on hearing the news of their trouble, implored her mother so earnestly, and with such affectionate persistence, to permit her to visit them, that the latter—who had many secret qualms of conscience with regard to her behaviour towards them,—at length allowed her to have her will. When to the great pleasure of her brother and Beatrice she one day arrived at Ferrycross Terrace, they were not a little shocked to see the effect which her sorrows were having on their sister, who, from a bright merry girl, was becoming listless, pale, silent and melancholy. They of course did their best to cheer her, and the pleasure of being once more with them, and the desire to do her best to console Beatrice for a grief with which none but a woman could thoroughly sympathise, together with the change of life and scene, began, after a time, to benefit Miss Chessington's health and spirits. Both her brother

and his wife had, however, to own with a sigh that she was still sadly different to the Catherine of a few months ago, and none of her friends was more pained to notice this than Wilfrid Oakburne, who was now constantly at the little house at Twickenham, and whose knowledge of, and sympathy with, most of their troubles and hopes, made him a welcome visitor. The sight of Miss Chessington's depression and half-concealed sorrow roused a chivalrous pity in the young doctor that considerably increased the antagonism he already felt towards his friend, Mr. Throckmorton's, proceedings, and all,—including even the members of his own family,—who were concerned in them. Perhaps the sentiment was the more increased by the fact that he regarded himself as being,—unintentionally, indeed, but still none the less certainly,—the prime mover in the inquiries which had led to the proof of Hoffbauer's title to the Otterstone property, and also because his brother Reginald was now so closely connected with those who were about to drive his friends from their old home. As he looked at Miss Chessington's pale face and sad eyes, he longed more than ever that the plaintiffs in the case of *Becchcroft v. Chessington* might prove unsuccessful. But, alas! it was only a vain longing, as he knew only too well, as Walter Chessington knew, and as even Lord Ashleigh, gallantly as he had struggled against the conviction, was at last beginning to own to himself.

That nobleman met his niece in London at the termination of her visit, and escorted her down to Otterstone. He had vowed never to speak to Walter again till he should have apologised for his little speech about the desirability of the money going with the title. His nephew's opposition was all the more bitter to him as

conflicting with an affection for him which had only grown gradually, and the full extent of which he had never realised till it was thus wounded. This, and the worry of the lawsuit, chafed and fretted him terribly, and his confidential servants began to remark that 'his lordship's temper,' which was formerly easy enough, was becoming 'outrageous.' Once, in the winter, having driven down from London to the neighbouring town of Richmond, he had met Walter and his wife, face to face, as they were crossing the bridge over the Thames, but had turned from them with a haughty scowl, and cut them dead. The incident, which rather amused Beatrice, who made some sharp remarks on his conduct, greatly pained and annoyed Chessington, and it required all his wife's gaiety and tenderness to cheer him that evening. Had it not been for her, he often said afterwards, he felt he never could have borne his troubles at this period, but she unflinchingly supported him through them all, soothing his wounded pride, making nought of the scruples as to the justice of his conduct which sometimes perplexed him, and refusing to be disheartened by the contemplation of either present or future evils. The ten guinea brief which her husband received, the few pounds he earned by literary work, chiefly procured through Oakburne's friend, Beverley Chipps, and all other like results of Walter's efforts to gain a livelihood, were by her kindly feminine hypocrisy made to appear the most cheering successes; and her affectionate solicitude and thoughtful tact, kept him from giving way to despondency, and enabled him to face his trials with patience and courage.

At last, in the beginning of May, the dreaded week of

the trial arrived. The marriage of the plaintiff with Major Oakburne had been celebrated some ten days before, and the happy pair had departed for a brief honeymoon to Paris, where our allies, in spite of the war, were holding an Exhibition, and sumptuously entertaining the Lord Mayor of London, in return for the splendid hospitalities shown by the latter to Baron de Haussez, Prefect of the Seine, and other French officials. Reginald's health was still so precarious that he had procured an extension of leave, and it was not yet certain whether he would be fit for service again. Sybil was only too glad to be out of the way, and Mr. Throckmorton was left as the commander in chief of the forces marshalled against the Chessington family, a post which he much enjoyed,—for while Lord Ashleigh, though still defiant, was almost hopeless, his opponent was calmly confident of winning the case which he had so many years ago longed in vain to fight.

As Walter Chessington, who was of course one of the principal witnesses for Miss Beechcroft, sat together with his wife and Wilfrid Oakburne in the little drawing room at Twickenham the night before the trial, the extent of the sacrifice he was making rose so vividly before his mind, that his self-control quite gave way for a time, and he yielded to a grief and despair which alarmed his two auditors.

‘It is not myself,’ he cried. ‘It is my poor mother and Catherine. For me there has always been this curse hanging over me, but for them it is so terribly cruel. Heavens! why was I born to bring such misery on them.’

‘Courage, Chessington!’ cried Wilfrid suddenly. ‘Something tells me that after all things will not turn

out as you think. You will not have to make the sacrifice you imagine.'

'Don't, for God's sake, Oakburne, talk nonsense! It maddens me, man. From a woman I can understand it, but not from you. Don't, I beg you,' and he went to the window.

'Nevertheless, I feel convinced of it,' said the other.

Walter gave a scornful laugh, and muttered something uncomplimentary; and shortly after, his friend, feeling his presence *de trop*, took his leave.

'Certainly, it must have sounded like the remark of an idiot,' said he to himself as he lighted his cigar. 'I wonder what could have made me say it. Would to heaven it could be true. Poor people! heaven help them!' and he went back to town in a very melancholy and irritable mood.

A letter lay awaiting him on the table, which bore the Lidfield post mark. He took it up listlessly, and then, recognising Mr. Simcox's handwriting, cast it aside with a peevish exclamation of disappointment.

'What can the poor old fellow have to say to me,' he thought. 'Some antiquarian twaddle no doubt. It will keep till to-morrow, and I am very sleepy.'

On second thoughts, however, as the envelope had 'urgent' written on it, and as he had not yet finished his cigar, he threw himself into a chair, and began to peruse the schoolmaster's somewhat feeble, but still neat and legible, characters. As he read his face began to assume a look of interest, which gradually grew stronger, and when he had finished the letter he began pacing the room in great perplexity. It was evidently no antiquarian twaddle, but something which caused him a good deal of doubt and agitation.

When next morning Mr. Throckmorton came down very early, prepared to start for Thornbury, and enquired for Dr. Oakburne, Mrs. Hollis told him that that gentleman had left the house at a still earlier hour, taking a carpet bag with him. She thought he could not have been to bed at all that night, and said that the dyspeptic city man, who now occupied Norton's room, had complained of being kept awake by the noise he made, 'a trampin' up an' down.'

'What has happened, I wonder,' thought Throckmorton; but he had no time to spare, and had soon forgotten all about Wilfrid in the bustle of his own journey.

CHAPTER XV.

Beehcroft v. Chessington.

Dear home in England, safe and fast

If but in thee my lot lie cast,

The past shall seem a nothing past

To thee, dear home, if won at last ;

Dear home in England, won at last.

—ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.

All yesterday I was spinning,

Sitting alone in the sun ;

And the dream that I spun was so lengthy,

It lasted till day was done.


I went up the hill this morning

To the place where my spinning lay—

There was nothing but glistening dewdrops

Remained of my dream to-day.

—ADELAIDE PROCTER.

HE court was crowded to suffocation when Miss Beehcroft's leading counsel, Mr. Briefrich, Q.C.,—with whom were Mr. Vane Pleasmore, and Mr. Bloobagge,—rose to open the case. The rival claimants were so well known in the neighbourhood, and the stake involved was so great, that considerable excitement prevailed as to the issue of the suit. There could only be one issue, thought Mr. Throckmorton, as he watched Lord Ashleigh, brave and composed outwardly, but inwardly very hopeless, enter the court. 'He

puts a good face on it,' said he to himself. 'It is hard perhaps on them, but justice must be done ! ' *Væ Victis !*'

The case of his client, said Mr. Briefrich, though it involved somewhat complicated details, was based on a very simple question. He admitted that the will of the late Lieutenant James Chessington, R.N., was in itself a perfectly valid legal document, and that the title of the defendants, under it, was in that sense perfectly well established. He should make no attempt whatever to impugn it, nor in any way question the conduct of those who held under it, believing it to be valid. He based his case on a graver matter,—on the disability of James Chessington to make any will dealing with the Otterstone property. He should prove that that property had never belonged to the deviser, that during the whole of his possession of it he was holding it illegally, and against the lawful owners, the heirs of his deceased elder brother, George Chessington, who were not only in existence during his lifetime, but had continued to be in existence till within a very recent period, in fact till the autumn of the previous year, when the last of those descendants of Sir Pelham Chessington's eldest son, met his death at the hands of an assassin, which must still be fresh in the recollection of many of the jury.

The learned counsel then went on, after stating those particulars of the history of Sir Pelham Chessington's sons and daughters, with which the reader is already familiar, to point out that the main point at issue was the legality of the marriage of Lieutenant George Chessington to Estelle Léon, a French lady who had been a governess in his father's house, and proceeded to produce documentary evidence, and to call witnesses in proof of his assertion. The certificate of the marriage in the

Rolhill Parish Register, and the copy of it found by Hoffbauer at Otterstone, were of course brought forward, together with the correspondence between George and Estelle Chessington, after which, to make the proof still more conclusive, old George Bolton, the witness who had signed the register, was placed in the box.

Though the old man's mind wandered at times as to other subjects, his memory on this point was wonderfully clear and accurate, and the severe cross-examination to which he was subjected by the defendant's counsel altogether failed to shake his testimony.

He had been George Chessington's servant in the regiment, and had been employed to carry notes from his young master to Mdle. Léon, who was governess to his master's sister, 'her who married Mr. Beehcroft of Thornbury. He knew all about their clandestine meetings, and the shifts they had been put to in order to prevent Sir Pelham's finding out their intercourse. He remembered distinctly having accompanied the young couple down to Rolhill. The lady had met his master in London at his lodgings, and they had gone down the next day. It was an out-of-the-way lonely place, a little church on the top of the down, no houses to speak of. The parson, Rev. Mr. Whitworth, was a friend of one of the officers in the regiment, he thought. Did not look quite the gentleman to his mind, and a bit rough in his manners, but quite a parson. He remembered him well, for he had a scar on his forehead. He had signed the book. That was his writing. He could write a bit before he got so old; had learnt as a boy at Otterstone, and been thought rather 'a scholar' in the regiment, where he used to write letters for the men 'to their lasses.' The young couple went back to London that very night, and soon after

the regiment was ordered to India. He remembered his master taking the lady to St. Katherine's Docks in London to send her off to Paris, and that she cried terribly, and that 'Mister George' seemed very much 'cut up' too. He had gone to India with the rest and had seen his master mortally wounded at the siege of Kistnagherry. His master had said to him just before he died; 'Mind Bolton you never say a word about my marriage till your mistress tells you to. Unless you're driven to it, don't speak about it at all.' He had been made to call young madam his 'mistress.' She was a pretty young thing, very quiet, quite a foreigner and couldn't speak much English. He'd a job to understand her at times. He'd kept to his word to his master and had never spoken till now. He'd been always very good to him, Mr. George had. They'd been always wonderful thick since they were boys together, and he'd have done anything for him. Didn't think so much of Mr. James. He was a navy gentleman, always away. He never saw much of him. No! He'd never spoken till now. Once, a short time back, he thought he'd seen a gentleman very like Mr. George, wonderful like him, but he knew nothing about him except that he was told he was a 'furineer' who did work for Mr. Walter. It was him who got murdered at the Hall they said. Yes! he'd come back with the regiment and taken his discharge and gone back to Otterstone, where Sir Pelham was very good to him. A real gentleman was Sir Pelham! Yes! He was an Otterstone man he was! He'd been born and bred in the place and he hoped to die there. Hadn't got long to wait now he thought! and so forth. He would gladly have rambled on with his reminiscences of the whole family, had not the court put a summary conclusion

to them. The appearance of this fine old octogenarian was very much admired by the public, and he was heartily cheered both on entering and leaving the court. His evidence was of course most damaging to the hopes of Lord Ashleigh and his friends, whose countenances visibly lengthened as Mr. Briefrich went on to prove Hoffbauer's descent and trace his history, and when Walter Chessington gave his evidence on these points his uncle's wrath was very manifest.

The examination of the plaintiff's witnesses and the statement of his case occupied nearly three days, and that learned Q.C., Mr. Briefrich, was cut short in his closing remarks, by the adjournment of the court. When they re-assembled next day he, and the two juniors, Mr. Vane Pleasmore and Mr. Bloobagge, as well as Mr. Throckmorton, were all alike struck by the change in the demeanour of Lord Ashleigh and of the opposing counsel, all of whose countenances wore, for the first time, not only a decidedly cheery, but an almost insolently triumphant expression.

'I suppose they are making the best of a bad business,' said Mr. Throckmorton to his friends. 'They can have nothing to say, and they want to say it as well as possible,' and when the statement of their own case had concluded, they waited with some amusement to hear how the enemy would manage to make anything like a fight against them.

Mr. Serjeant Feezebrooke, who was assisted by Mr. Rollscourt Smith, Q.C., Mr. Templemann, and Mr. Draftington Wigge, being called on by the court, rose, and, with a side glance at the learned gentlemen opposed to him, said that he wished to make a few remarks before getting to the subject matter of his brief. Within the

last twenty-four hours evidence, he said, had been put into his hands which, while strengthening, somewhat changed the nature of the defence he was about to put forward against the extraordinary claims urged by the plaintiff's counsel.

There was much bobbing about of wigs, and whispering, and writing on scraps of paper, among the last named gentlemen, on hearing this remark, after making which, Mr. Feezebrooke paused for a moment, and then resumed his discourse in his well-known deliberate tones. His learned friends, the counsel for the plaintiff, had, he was pleased to see, admitted the intrinsic validity of the will of the late Mr. James Chessington, and had confined themselves to disputing the ability of that gentleman to make it. He was glad of this, he repeated, because it made his task much easier,—his learned friends smiled at the word 'easier,' but he could assure them that they were smiling too soon,—it made his task much *easier*, he must again remark, because he should not now have to trouble himself to enquire into the extraordinary pedigrees, and romantic careers of foreign adventurers, with accounts of which they had been favoured at such length, and about which he did not think the Jury need trouble themselves much either. He should confine himself to what his learned friend had justly shewn was the sole point on which the case turned ;—the ability, namely, of James Chessington to dispose of the Otterstone property by will ; and he should proceed to show that that gentleman had every power requisite for thus disposing of it. He had every power and right thus to devise his estates, because they were his absolutely, inasmuch as this pretended marriage of George Chessington's which, if valid, would have

deprived him of his title, was not a marriage at all in the legal sense of the term. It was no marriage at all, he repeated, and consequently the issue of that union, assuming always that the people supposed to be so were really such issue,—a point which he would leave it to the jury to decide,—were illegitimate. Yes! his learned brethren might try to appear amused,—an audible ‘pooh, pooh,’ escaped from Mr. Throckmorton in his eagerness,—but he was about to bring forward the most irrefragable testimony to show that this so-called marriage was celebrated by a person who was not a priest in holy orders as the law required, and was therefore illegal and void.

It may be imagined that there was a good deal of excitement among the public in court, and that there were evident signs of anxiety among Miss Beechcroft’s legal champions, when, after this startling announcement, Dr. Wilfrid Oakburne, was called into the witness box, and asked to state how and where he had come across the parish register of Rolhill, containing the entry of George Chessington’s marriage. When first Wilfrid, and after him Mr. Simcox, had described the finding of this record of births, deaths, and marriages, and had borne witness to the out-of-the-way place in which it had been discovered, and to its dilapidated condition,—the reader will remember that some of its pages had been torn, and others burnt,—the learned Sergeant went on to discuss it more fully with the jury. He begged them to observe that some of the entries were signed in the name of Whitworth, but others in the name of Bovill.

‘When I tell you, gentlemen,’ continued Mr. Sergeant Feezebrooke, ‘that there is no record that any clergyman, save Mr. Bovill the rector, ever did duty during this

period in Rolhill Church, you will admit at once that it is a very strange and suspicious circumstance that this other signature of Whitworth, F. J. Whitworth, should so frequently occur in ——'

'My lord! I protest my lord against this spinning out the case by dwelling on such trivialities!' cries Mr. Bloobagge, the youngest of Miss Beechcroft's junior counsel, springing excitedly to his feet, 'Is valuable time to be wasted in explaining that a rector and a curate sign a register altern——.'

'Really, Mr. Bloobagge, I must request you not to interrupt me in this absurd manner!' says the learned orator turning majestically to Mr. Bloobagge, with an expression of surprised scorn.

The young barrister,—it was only his second brief,—feeling a warning kick on the shins from Mr. Vane Pleasmore, the learned brother sitting beside him, sat down abashed, and resumed his drawing of figures on the blotting paper in front of him, in order to recover his composure.

'Yes, gentlemen,' resumed Mr. Serjeant Feezebrooke to the jury, 'one of the signatures is indeed that of the rector, as my learned friend has obligingly pointed out to us,—and the remark does credit to his sagacity,'—(laughter at Mr. Bloobagge's expense, which he affects not to notice), 'but the other signature, I regret to say, is not that of the curate, as he ingeniously suggests. Gentlemen, Mr. Bovill, the rector of Rolhill, had no curate. It is a disgrace to England,—a disgrace, I am thankful to say, which is now well nigh impossible in our enlightened age,—it is a disgrace, I say, that such men as he was should ever have been allowed to hold a living, and be entrusted with a cure of souls. Mr. Bovill's life

was one long scandal and reproach to that Church which permitted him to perform, or rather to grossly neglect to perform those holy offices which it is the duty of her servants to administer. Mr. Bovill, I repeat once more, never kept a curate; and the person called Whitworth, who has been aliuded to during the course of this trial as the Rev. F. J. Whitworth, and has so often signed his name to this register, has no more right to the title of Reverend than I have. He was Mr. Bovill's clerk and schoolmaster, he never made any pretence of being in holy orders, and the numerous couples over whom he read the marriage service were no more legally united than they would have been if any of you gentlemen, to whose sagacity and experience the decision of this case is entrusted, had done the same.'

Then, amid the growing excitement of all his audience, the speaker went on to explain that the hamlet of Rolhill formed part of the living of Blackmoor in the neighbouring county that it was a neglected isolated village, and that Mr. Bovill, the rector, was in the habit of only going once a month to do duty there. Mr. Bovill, as he would shortly prove to them, was a man of very bad character, one of the remnant of the hard-drinking, fox-hunting clergy, who were the scandal of the Church of England during the eighteenth century, frequenting races and cock-fights, gambling, rioting, giving their whole time to sport and amusement, neglecting their duty, and, in short, doing anything but lead a christian life. Parson 'Joe Bovill,' as he was commonly called, was a notorious evil liver even in those days of irreligion, but, though such a bad shepherd, his gambling propensities and extravagance made it a necessity for him to fulfil all those obligations towards his flock which could earn him

fees. Not caring, therefore, to go to the expense of keeping a curate, he had been in the habit of making his clerk, Whitworth, who was the village schoolmaster of Blackmoor, officiate whenever it was required at Rolhill in his own clerical robes. Its remote situation made the church a favourite resort for run-away couples, and it was for this reason that it had been suggested to George Chessington by a brother officer, who was acquainted both with its reputation, and also with 'parson Joe Bovill.' Whitworth, the clerk, was a self-educated and rather stupid, but not ill-meaning man, against whose character there was nothing particular to be said. He had evidently enjoyed the importance conferred on him by his office, and appeared not to have had the slightest idea that he was doing anything wrong in officiating as a clerk in Holy Orders, which he perhaps imagined his post of parish clerk fully entitled him to do. He therefore took an honest pride in signing his own name to the entries in the register, a fact as to which his rector, wholly engrossed with his own pleasures, appeared never to have troubled himself until it was forced upon him.

Of the witnesses called in support of these facts, Caius Whitworth, yeoman farmer, whom the reader will remember as the proprietor of the Blue Boar's Head Inn, was the most important. Frederic Joseph Whitworth, who had thus acted as parson, was his father's brother, and he therefore of course remembered him and his performance of his duties perfectly well, nor had he indeed himself any idea of its illegality. His uncle had gone by the name of 'Parson Joe's parson,' or the 'Parson's parson,' in Rolhill parish, and had, he knew, buried, married, and christened very many of its inhabi-

tants. He remembered, too, the scandal that had been caused by 'Parson Joe Bovill's' bad living, and how at last the Bishop of the Diocese had found it necessary to investigate the reports which reached him regarding his conduct. Then it was that Bovill, after having inspected it, ordered his clerk, Whitworth, to destroy the parish register. The latter, however, after one or two ineffectual attempts to do so, failed to screw up his courage to the proper point, and after having torn and burnt portions of it, as has been shewn, finally compromised the matter by hiding it in the recess below the window in the priest's room, as being the place where it was least likely to be discovered. He had told his brother, Caius Whitworth's father, of what he had done, and the latter had afterwards communicated the fact to his son, but it had never occurred to either of them that the subject was in any way worth bothering their heads about.

Other witnesses were then called by Mr. Sergeant Feezebrooke to corroborate this testimony, and when, after an eloquent speech reviewing the whole of the facts, he asked the jury whether in the face of such evidence they could consent 'to drive from their home a family whose ancestors had so long dwelt in Clayshire, and who were so universally respected and beloved throughout the county for their virtues and generosity,' it was felt by Mr. Throckmorton and his friends that the battle was lost.

All that forensic skill could do in cross-examination of their opponents' witnesses was done by Mr. Briefrich and his fellow counsel ; and if the plain facts that had been submitted by the former to the jury could have been disproved by consummate legal oratory, that gentleman's reply on the defendant's case would have done so. But

on this occasion his ability and experience were exercised in vain. The summing up of the judge was, as was plainly foreseen by all that it must be, overwhelmingly in favour of the defendant, and the jury had almost made up their minds before his lordship began his able charge. They considered but for twenty minutes, and then returned the only verdict that it was possible for them to do:—that James Chessington was in absolute legal possession of his property at the time that he made his will, and that consequently that property belonged to those who had acquired it by descent from Captain Horace Chessington, to whom it had been devised by that instrument.

So the trial was at last ended, and the victors drove off amid the cheers of the crowd, while the vanquished, as is ever expected of them, made their way home in silence and despondency. Otterstone Hall was once more secured to Walter Chessington and his heirs, and Edward Throckmorton had experienced almost the severest disappointment, that ever came to him in life.

The MS. of my esteemed friend and connection, Mr. Edward Throckmorton, which I have thus far had the pleasure of placing before the reader, here breaks off abruptly. His chagrin and grief at the result of his efforts in behalf of his ward, Miss Beechcroft, were very excessive, though her own feelings were rather those of relief than disappointment, when she learnt that the hopes he had formed for her had been frustrated. He had been actuated chiefly by the desire to repair the injustice done, by the will of James Chessington, and to restore the inheritance, to which he held her to be in equity

entitled, to the daughter of his old friend. The unexpected way in which his plans, which gave such a fair promise of success, were defeated, led him for some time to feel considerable resentment against Dr. Oakburne, who, in conjunction with Mr. Simcox, was mainly instrumental in causing the loss of the lawsuit. When he had learnt from the schoolmaster's letter the story of 'Parson Joe Bovill' and his 'Parson's parson,' Whitworth, Oakburne had, after informing Lord Ashleigh's solicitors of the facts, at once gone down to the spot and worked untiringly in the interests of his friend Chessington, with the result that has just been described above. Mr. Throckmorton's natural sense of justice, and generous nature, made him however, after a time, fully forgive his friend, with whom he renewed his old intimacy, and to whom, at his death, he left a substantial token of his esteem. The bulk of his property, which was considerable, was left to his ward, Sybil, now Mrs. Reginald Oakburne, with whom, during the whole of his life, he maintained the closest and most affectionate intercourse. He never ceased, however, till the day of his death to express his regret that she, 'the heiress of Otterstone,' had not been restored to her rights as he desired.

Among the papers which, as his executor, came into my possession, are some which enable me, before taking leave of the reader, to give him a few particulars of the subsequent history of most of the characters to whom he has been introduced in Mr. Throckmorton's narrative.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Chessington did not long remain at variance with their relatives after the decision of the Otterstone will case. They were naturally rather elated at its unexpected result, and were a little inclined to assume a haughty tone towards those who had treated

their efforts to do what they considered just with such indignant and angry contempt. Their virtue, when they least anticipated it, had brought them a most substantial reward in addition to that which good actions of themselves give to the doers, and they were therefore not unwilling for a brief space to assert their superiority over those beings of inferior clay, who had failed to see the merit of their behaviour, and were now no longer able to rate them for it. It is satisfactory, however, to record that Lord Ashleigh was, in this instance, the first to come forward and make peace. Now that everything had turned out so well, he was warm in his admiration of Walter's conduct, the motive for which, though he had affected to despise it, he yet in his heart of hearts really respected and liked. He visited his nephew and his wife, who still continued to remain for a month after the law suit in their now triumphant exile at Twickenham, frankly owned that he had been perhaps hasty, and soon succeeded in making his peace with the young couple. Shortly after, the happy family party was once more re-united at Otterstone, to the unspeakable delight of Lady Adela and her daughter, who now speedily recovered her health and spirits. Walter Chessington once more sought the suffrages of the Lidfield electors, and had again the satisfaction of defeating his rival, Ferdinand Boarsby. He represented the borough for many years after, till the programme of reform, advanced by his party, caused him to abandon their ranks and relinquish his seat in favour of his old opponent, who was always ready to occupy it. He eventually inherited the bulk, both of Lord Ashleigh's and his father-in-law, Mr. Elkfield's, properties, and is so rich that he has been more than once offered a baronetcy. His chief reason

for refusing this is supposed to be the fact that Mrs. Chessington has presented him with nothing but daughters. He is very fond of his three girls, and is quite content to have no heir, nor does he care for the distinction for himself, which his wife, who would certainly like the title personally, has often vainly urged him to accept. They are both all the better, and their affection for each other all the stronger, for their little period of probation ; and they are very popular, and do a great deal of good in the county.

Major Oakburne appears to have been excessively mortified by the result of the suit of *Beechcroft v. Chessington*, and like Mr. Throckmorton, to have felt rather angry at first, with his brother, for his share in the proceedings, a feeling, however, which his better nature soon enabled him to overcome. Much against his wife's wishes, he again returned to the Crimea, where he further distinguished himself in the battle of the Tchernaya, and was also present at the taking of Sebastopol, at which he was somewhat severely wounded. After this he yielded to his wife's entreaties, and, much to her relief, retired from the army with the rank of colonel, returning to England with Dr. Norton, who had also won the Victoria Cross for his gallant conduct in the field, and who, by his marriage with Miss Ethel Oakburne, which shortly after took place, was brought into still closer connection with the family of his friend Wilfrid. Colonel and Mrs. Oakburne have now for many years lived very happily at Thornbury Grange. The Colonel is a great sportsman, and an energetic magistrate, and his wife is very devoted to the poor around her. The former was never happy till he had purchased from Mr. Chessington a small portion of the Otterstone estates, a proceeding which in time led to

a very close intimacy between the two families ; and it is not impossible that the friendship between his son Reginald,—who is just leaving Oxford, and from his boyhood has passed a good deal of his time at Otterstone Hall,—and Miss Beatrice Chessington, Walter's eldest daughter, may some day lead to a union which would place the property once more in possession of an Oakburne.

Catherine Chessington has had a good many chances of changing her name, but remains Catherine Chessington still. She persistently spoils her nieces, is adored by the poor, and passes her life in kindly ministrations to all about her. Her mother and her uncle, and her good friend Mr. Bowersby, have all long since passed away. She is rich, but all her substance is given to others, and she and Mrs. Oakburne of Thornbury Grange have between them organised a hospital at Thornbury town, to which they are constant visitors.

Dr. Oakburne, who still remains one of her greatest friends, is now a sober and rather stout, middle-aged gentleman. He eventually carried out his plan of purchasing Dr. Dosey's practice, and, though his mother is dead, and his sister married, as has been said, to Dr. Norton,—who has a permanent appointment at St. Christopher's Hospital,—he still lives alone in the old house, where he was born, on the banks of the Lidd. His practice is far larger than he cares about, and among the poor of the town his name is a household word. His means were increased, not only by the legacy, above mentioned, from his friend Mr. Throckmorton, but also by one bequeathed to him by Lord Ashleigh, who always expressed the warmest gratitude for the service he had rendered him and his

family at the trial. He keeps up his intercourse with Frederica Ledru, who, after inheriting Madam Rovelli's money, eventually married a wealthy stockbroker who lived a few doors off from her house in Bedford Square. He pays periodical visits to Otterstone and to Thornbury, and now and then rides over to Rolhill to visit the quiet churchyard on the downs in which Mr. Simcox, has long since been laid to rest beside his daughter.

It need hardly be said that Mr. Raymond D'Arcy Portal attained to the highest position in Lidfield; was, at at one time or another, churchwarden, mayor, chairman of all the boards, and president of half the societies in his native town; that he had almost the best practice in Hillshire; and that he became extremely rich. At his death his fellow-townsmen were unanimous in their expressions of regret, and a handsome tablet in Lidfield church, representing Charity and Faith mourning over a prostrate figure of Truth grasping a broken spear, records the grief of all who knew him, and all the virtues which it is possible for a man and a husband to possess.

Thus, of all the characters that have been shewn to the reader prosperous and happy, as actors are bound to appear when the curtain is about to fall on them, none has more reason to be thankful with his lot than Wilfrid Oakburne, happy in his well wrought work, and happy with his friends in his leisure, and never more content than when he finds himself at Otterstone, in the old house that has played so great a part in his life, the home of his race in far off days, and now the home of his best friends.

It rises before me now as I saw it with my dear friend Mr. Throckmorton one clear, still, autumn evening long ago. Of how many histories has it

not been the silent witness ! How many happy children have played in its pleasant gardens, and grown out of their merry playtime into manhood and womanhood, to labour and to enjoy, to suffer and to die ! The last gleam of the fading sunlight for a moment on the ivy-covered tower, on the broad terrace and the bright belt of flowers that skirts it, casting chequered patterns of gold between the trees that shadow the green slope below, painting with orange, and emerald, and crimson, the dark silent waters of the river gliding among the reeds. A moment, and the light has vanished, and the grey twilight falls over all, hiding house, trees, lawns, and stream, in a sombre gloom, and warning me that my task is done, and that it is time for me, kind reader, to bid you goodbye.

THE END.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 045842066